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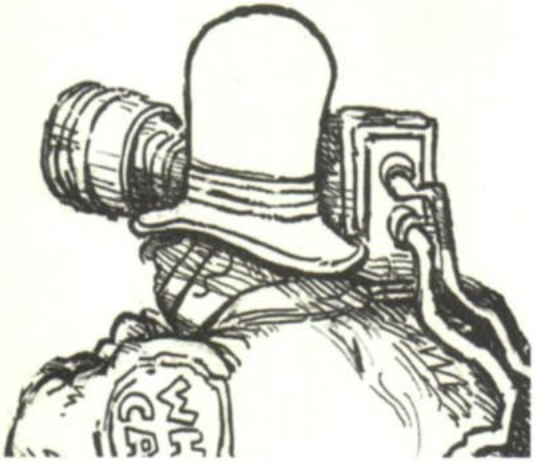

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Contents

The Washington Monthly
Volume 29, Number 12 • December 1997

Features

4 TILTING AT WINDMILLS
Hush Kits . . . Legal Literati . . . Buckin' Bagels . . . Remembering Robinson . . . The Humphrey Daggers.
BY CHARLES PETERS

8 **Silent Witness**
Senate investigators never called the one man who could clear up the Babbitt case.
BY SAMUEL SEIDEL

10 **What the White House Tapes Really Show**
The Keystone Kops behind the cameras.
BY MICHELLE COTTLE

17 **National Security for Sale**
How our obsession with privatizing government has left us vulnerable to nuclear terrorism.
BY NURITH C. AIZENMAN

24 **Liberalism's Flagship Adrift at Sea**
How *The New Republic* can find its way home.
BY RICHARD BLOW

31 **The Peacemaker**
How Jimmy Carter helped save us from war with North Korea.
BY DON OBERDORFER

38 ART & POLITICS
Edible Complex
The real secret to Dean & Deluca's success: convincing Americans that good taste doesn't come cheap.
BY PILAR GUZMAN

In search of holiday gift ideas? See page 41.

On Political Books

42 **Harvard Schmarvard**
Getting into the Ivy League is neither as hard, nor as important, as the meritocratic elites make it out to be.
BY JAY MATHEWS

45 **Poisoned Ivy**
For some students, getting into Harvard is the easy part.
BY JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

49 **The Hedgerows Were Deadly**
And no one was warned.
BY CHARLES W. BAILEY

51 **A Parallel Universe**
The growing gap between military and civilian values, and why it's a problem.
BY AMY WALDMAN

54 POLITICAL BOOKNOTES
Reviews by Harry McPherson, Daniel H. Pink, Joseph D. McNamara, and Michael Brus.

Departments

2 **Letters**

16 **Memo of the Month**

22 **Who's Who**

29 **Monthly Journalism Award**

37 **Tidbits & Outrages**

COVER ART: LA MOUCHE

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Letters

State of the Unions

Except for your obvious disapproval of teachers' unions you usually come down on the right side of organized labor. Unfortunately, you blew it in the October "Tilting at Windmills." Both the UPS strike and the PATCO (air traffic controllers) strike were more concerned with safety than wages.

The safety issues addressed by PATCO included relief from the excessively long hours spent on the job, the training and hiring of new controllers, and the repair or replacement of outmoded computer and radar equipment. Their safety concerns were not for themselves but for the flying public also. A footnote about wages: Many controllers were earning less than $13,000 per year. That works out to $6.25 an hour for a 40-hour week. Even then that was a disgraceful pittance for such demanding work.

G.E. Walch
West Springfield, MA

Charles Peters responds:

Air traffic controllers were certainly performing—and continue to perform—essential and demanding work. However, the fact is that at the time of the strike they were being more than adequately compensated. As the Monthly *has previously reported (see for instance "Money Over What Really Mattered," Sept. 1983) the average controller was making $40,000 a year; with overtime and differential pay, some made as much as $60,000. And the controllers had one of the best retirement plans in the nation: half-pay at age 50 after 20 years of service, or at any age after 25 years of service. Nonetheless, when PATCO launched the strike, its three major demands were not about improving safety but about providing an even sweeter deal for its members. The union called for a $10,000 across-the-board pay raise for all controllers, a 32-hour work week, and retirement after 20 years at 75 percent of an employee's top pay. It was these demands, not the controller's safety concerns, that dominated PATCO's discussions with the Federal Aviation Administration.*

Shades of Grey

While the legislative scandal known as BOPTROT said much about the culture of coziness and money in our legislature, it had nothing to do with the campaign finance reforms enacted in 1992. ("Why Mitch McConnell Should Know Better," Oct. 1997) In fact, the chief target of BOPTROT, House Speaker Don Blandford, was instrumental in getting the campaign-reform bill through the House at the very time he was being ensnared in the FBI sting. He used his power to get skeptical House members to swallow such drastic ideas as public financing and runoff elections. It's a lesson that most people in the political process wear hats that are neither all black nor all white, and that legislative leaders' power, often too autocratic, can be used for good.

Al Cross, political writer
The Courier-Journal
Louisville, KY

Off Track

Nurith C. Aizenman's article about transportation safety did a good job sensationalizing unrelated anecdotes but did little to provide readers with an accurate picture of railroad safety ("The Case for More Regulation," Oct. 1997). Many important and easily verifiable facts were omitted.

For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation confirms that 9 out of 10 rail-related fatalities are caused by motorists at highway-rail intersections or people illegally present on rail property. Railroads have little or no control over these incidents.

As for other rail-related incidents, it's hard to imagine an objective discussion of rail safety ignoring the fact that the train accident rate has been reduced nearly 70 percent since 1980, 23 percent just since 1990. It also should have been noted that railroads are the safest way to move hazardous materials and that 99.9 percent of the nearly 1 million hazardous materials that rail tank cars shipped in the U.S. last year arrived incident free.

Finally, Ms. Aizenman's criticism of the Federal Railroad Administration's willingness to work with the rail industry is misguided. Rather than solely playing the role of a traffic cop handing out fines, FRA has demonstrated its willingness to work with rail employees, rail management, and many others to build upon the industry's continually improving record of safety. Americans should demand nothing less from their government.

C.E. Dettmann
Executive Vice President
Assoc. of American Railroads
Washington, DC

Look to the Stars

Robert Worth's essay regarding U.S. military command structures in the October issue contains a howler, namely that, in 1948, "Eisenhower informed his fellow four-stars . . . ." General Eisenhower got a fifth star on December 20, 1944, and it was confirmed as his peacetime rank on April 11, 1946. Thus, when the essay asserts that the United States has more three-star generals and admirals now than at the end of World War II, well, you'll forgive me for saying, show me the figures.

Charles H. Brown II
Costa Mesa, CA

Robert Worth responds:

True, Eisenhower was a five-star general. But fifth stars are only given out in wartime, and none have been granted since World War II. Since then, the words "four stars" have become synonymous with the highest possible military rank. It was in that sense that I referred to "Eisenhower's fellow four-stars," though I admit that the phrase was technically inaccurate.

Regarding the figures on three-star generals and admirals: In 1945 there were 86. Today there are 116. What's more, the ratio of flag officers to enlisted men has nearly doubled, from about 1 per 50 in '45 to about 1 per 30 today.

Comfort Zone

Robert Worth's question, "Why is the military clinging to outdated and ineffective command structures?" has a simple answer: Soldiers do what they

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know how to do. It need not be correct, relevant, useful nor what needs to be done, just something that is familiar, hence natural and comforting.

Going to Vietnam with the force and attitudes designed to defend against an assault by the Warsaw Pact through the Fulda Gap was natural. Understanding what the French had learned about "Revolutionary War" was not. Continuing to buy useless "combat" aircraft is an American tradition; thinking about their actual utility in any war is not.

Worth's critical thinking can be extended to the other traditional follies fastened on our nation by the Military Industrial Congressional Complex (the original phrase). And have him consider the "new wars of our time," particularly our vulnerability to terrorism and the various weapons of mass destruction our disaffected population may elect to use to express its building frustrations.

CARL F. BERNARD
Alexandria, VA

Protecting the Innocent

Contrary to claims made in "Guilty Victims" (Oct. 1997), state crime victim compensation programs are helping an enormous number of deserving victims—most of whom are women and children. Federal reports show that in each of the past six years, 25 percent to 30 percent of the recipients of victim compensation nationwide have been children. In state after state, more than half of the recipients of compensation are female, and many are victims of domestic violence. This is despite the fact that males are twice as likely to become victims of violence as women. And while men who become victims of knifings and gunshots tend to require greater expenditures for medical care than child victims of sexual abuse or women in abusive relationships, compensation programs are spending close to $50 million per year—a fifth of all payouts—for mental health counseling, chiefly benefiting children and female victims.

The "estimate" based on an "admittedly unscientific sampling" that 8 percent of compensated victims have a "recent criminal record" is also misleading: A large number of those individuals did not have criminal records prior to their victimization, but only subsequently committed some offense. Should compensation programs really be expected to base their decisions on predictions of future criminal behavior?

DAN EDDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CRIME VICTIM
COMPENSATION BOARDS
Alexandria, VA

Missing the Point

We respect the right of the *Monthly* to publish whatever it wants, but L.J. Davis' review of our book, *Big Money Crime*, ("S-uperficial & L-azy," Oct. 1997) is so full of inaccuracies, peculiar misunderstandings, and plain vitriol, that we feel pressed to respond.

Davis fumes that we "missed everything of importance," by which he apparently means two things: first, that there are skeletons in the closet (e.g. Michael Milken) that we ignored, and second, that many policymakers (e.g. Jake Garn and Ronald Reagan) were stupid. Davis thus "misses everything of importance" about the book. This is not yet another exposé of the S&L scandal, but an analysis of what went wrong and why. Neither do we merely establish that S&L's were "a den of thieves." Instead, we explain how structural conditions turn ordinary business men into "thieves" and what aspects of our political system greased the wheels. Coining the term "collective embezzlement," we analyze this new form of white-collar crime—robbing one's own bank, so to speak—as the signature crime of the new finance capitalism.

Davis' review is disheartening, not only because of its hostility, but more importantly because of its anti-intellectual tenor. He clearly has disdain for academics and others whose goal is not just discovering bodies, but analyzing the reasons for the massacre. It is just this kind of reductionist thinking that the book is meant to debunk.

KITTY CALAVITA
HENRY PONTELL
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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

Hush Kits • Legal Literati • Buckin' Bagels
Remembering Robinson • The Humphrey Daggers

PAULA JONES WANTS TO DROP her lawsuit's claim that her reputation was damaged by Trooper Danny Ferguson's allegation to *The American Spectator* that she had told him, after leaving the Little Rock hotel room, that she was willing to be the governor's girlfriend. Since it was the *Spectator*'s report that originally upset her and her husband, why is she now willing to forget about it? Because by making her reputation an issue, it opened the door for the defense to, in the words of Ferguson's lawyer Bill Bristow, "determine what her reputation was."

• • • • • • • •

REMEMBER HARRY AND LOUISE? Well, they're coming back, and you better not believe them this time. The memo that appears on page 16 of this issue is from Melody Harned to Michael Fortier. Both work for the Health Insurance Association of America, the outfit that sponsored Harry and Louise. This time, they want to kill proposed bills of rights for managed care patients. The memo says "Senate Republicans need a lot of help from their friends on the outside" and that Trent Lott's office had told them to "get off your butts, get off your wallet."

There was a ray of hope that the health insurers might be reasonable about this matter. As we reported last month, three HMOs, including HIP Health Insurance Plans, came out for "legally enforceable national standards" to protect managed care patients. But now it appears there will be a major effort to defeat such standards. We should be grateful to Robert Pear of *The New York Times*, who uncovered the Harned memo. The alarm he sounded could awaken HMO patients to their need to fight for their rights. They are a large group that includes many of the kind of respectable, middle-class citizens that legislators are wary of offending. So Harry and Louise and their pal, Trent Lott, just might lose.

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ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION of our point that, although an extreme version, the faults of the District of Columbia government are nevertheless typical of local government: *The Washington Post* reports that the District's Department of Corrections does not monitor overtime to determine whether the hours were actually worked. And a Wisconsin paper that was investigating a drug-dealing court clerk found that elected county officials are not required to report sick days or absences from the office for any reason. "There's no statutory requirement that says they ever need to show up."

The motivation for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was not foreign policy but domestic politics. LBJ wanted to show the electorate that he could be tough.

• • • • • • • •

REPORTERS ALSO DISCOVERED that the Wisconsin official in question, who seemed to spend much of his time on cocaine, would in January become eligible for a lifetime pension with free lifetime health insurance even though he was only 58 and had only worked for the county for 15 years.

• • • • • • • •

IN RECENT YEARS SY HERSH, who's an old friend—we first met when he attended one of those planning sessions for the *Monthly* in 1968—has called me five or six times to ask me about the 1960 West Virginia primary and share his findings about what the Kennedys had done to win. His figures on what the campaign had spent were much higher than my own estimates. But I had enough respect for Sy that I went back to old associates in the campaign and rechecked my recollection. Another factor in my curiosity was that I had reason to believe that some of my colleagues had suspected me of Boy Scout tendencies and may not have been excessively frank with me.

I turned to the two friends from the campaign who I felt both knew what they were talking about and would tell me the truth. The man who knew the most about the state-wide expenditures says the total figure, although higher than I had origninally thought, was less than $1 milion. The other friend, who knows the most about what

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was spent in the state's largest county says that sum was $25,000. So Hersh's estimates of $2 to $4 million seem more than a little bit off.

But what is most troubling about my conversations with Sy is how often he said "bullshit" to the lines of inquiry I suggested, even when I was identifying sources I knew would give some support to his case. Instead, his book shows that he relied heavily on information supplied by two ex-convicts—neither of whom worked in the Kennedy campaign.

There is one anecdote in Sy's book that I repeatedly warned him rang of falsity. It's one that has Bobby Kennedy at a post-election party showing a county leader who had only requested $5,000 for his organization "a little black book," pointing to the figure $40,000, and saying, "You could have gotten this." Anyone who knew Robert Kennedy knows that that story just doesn't fit him. He was awkward with pols, not a Tip O'Neill, not the kind of guy to sit around headquarters regaling the boys with tales of campaign shenanigans.

In fairness to Sy, I have to confess that I have discovered that one of his anecdotes is essentially true. This is the story originally told by Hubert Humphrey in *The Education of A Public Man* in which he said Cardinal Cushing had told him that the cardinal and Joe Kennedy had agreed on a way to counter West Virginia's anti-Catholicism: "We decided which church and preacher would get $200 or $100 or $500." It does seem, from what I'm now told, that some of my Kennedy campaign colleagues found the month before the primary to be an appropriate occasion for a gift to Protestant clergy.

•••••••

PENTAGON OFFICIALS KEEP assuring us that readiness remains high. Not so, says the rumor mill. The military columnist Ernest Blazar says that readiness reports are being inflated and that troops are training less. One service, the Air Force, is trying to make it sound like there is more training than there actually is: "The service now counts multiple training maneuvers during a single flight as separate training events." And not long ago, a Marine told me that when a battalion from his regiment is assigned a mission, it has to strip two other battalions of men and equipment in order to make itself truly ready.

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PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS HAVE become a big business. There are 60,855 of them in Los Angeles county alone. Many wear uniforms and look just like regular police. But the resemblance, as they say in Hollywood, may be purely coincidental. One named William D. Owen got a state license and went right to work stealing credit cards and checks from mailboxes of houses he had been hired to guard. "The way it is now, an ax-murderer ... can come to California to be a security guard and we would never know it," an official told the *Los Angeles Times*. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to learn that this is true in a good many other states.

•••••••

I HAVE AN IDEA FOR A BOOK. IT would be about political daggers in the heart—events that doomed otherwise promising candidacies. An obvious example would be what the Iran-hostage crisis—and most particularly the Desert One fiasco—did to Jimmy Carter in 1980. Election eve happened to be the first anniversary of the Iranian takeover of our embassy in Tehran. So the television networks ran lengthy retrospective segments reminding everyone of the humiliation we had suffered ever since. The result was that Carter's ratings in the polls, which had been running practically even with Reagan's, went into a free fall, fully confirmed by the voters the next day.

In Hubert Humphrey's case there was not one dagger. There were three. One was Eugene McCarthy's refusal to endorse him until it was too late. Second was Jacqueline Kennedy's marriage to Aristotle Onassis just a month before the election, which took the bloom off the rose of Camelot. And finally, there was the sabotage by Anna Chennault, at John Mitchell's urging, of the Vietnamese peace talks the weekend before election day. This would make a great project for Doris Kearns Goodwin or Michael Beschloss, whose remarkable talents are on display in two books published this fall.

Goodwin's *Wait Till Next Year*, in telling the story of her years as a Dodgers fan, perfectly captures a slice of life in the late '40s and early '50s. I say this as one who lived in New York at the time and was also a baseball fan. I first went to Ebbets Field in 1947 to see the Dodgers play the St. Louis Cardinals in a crucial game in early August. The Cardinals, featuring Stan Musial and Enos Slaughter, had dominated the National League thus far in the '40s, winning three World Series. But now Jackie Robinson had joined the Dodgers. When he got on base Robinson threatened to steal on every pitch. The Cardinals' pitchers were rattled and the Dodgers won that day. They went on to win the pennant that year and became the league's top team for the next decade.

Beschloss' book *Taking Charge* contains his transcription of Lyndon Johnson's White House tapes from 1963 to 1964 and Beschloss' annotations, which are the most fascinating footnotes I have ever read. Beschloss confirms a hunch I had back in 1964 that the motivation for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was not foreign policy but domestic politics. LBJ wanted to show the electorate that he could be tough.

•••••••

SPEAKING OF MY EXPERIENCE IN New York in the '40s, it was the first time I had encountered a bagel. Such exotica was unavailable in Charleston, West Virginia, where I had grown up. But the world has changed. According to a

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recent article in *The New York Times*, you can even find a restaurant called the Buckin' Bagel on Main Street in Boise, Idaho.

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I FEEL SORRY FOR THE DEMOCRATS. They lost the elections in Virginia, New Jersey, and Staten Island in part because the Republicans had so much more money to spend. Democratic fundraising has been inhibited by the campaign finance scandal and the Democratic National Committee, instead of having money to hand out, is in debt. According to Richard Berke of *The New York Times*, the Democrats "still owe more than $15 million" because of the scandal. So the Republicans—together with their co-conspirators in the press—have succeeded in tarring the Democrats with the campaign finance scandal. As a result, the Democrats lose elections even though there is probably more evidence against the Republicans in terms of their official actions—namely roll call votes by congressmen—being influenced by campaign contributions.

RFK was awkward with pols, not a Tip O'Neill, not the kind of guy to sit around headquarters regaling the boys with tales of campaign shenanigans.

But the Democrats were not without fault in their losses. In Virginia, the Democratic candidate for governor, Don Beyer, misrepresented his opponent's stand on abortion. In New Jersey, Democrat James McGreevey continued his party's tradition of selling out to the trial lawyers lobby. He opposed a reform, favored by Christine Todd Whitman, that would have made it possible for state motorists to lower their insurance bills. Motorists, under the reform, would get the lower rate in return for giving up the right to sue for "pain and suffering." They would still be compensated for actual medical costs and for lost earnings. Andrew Tobias recently explained what the effect of such a reform would be. In Michigan, where a similar rule is in effect, there are only one-third as many claims for whiplash injuries as in other jurisdictions.

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MARKET ENTHUSIASTS tell us that competition always benefits the consumer. But the credit card business, which, with more than 6,000 issuers of just the VISA card, seems extremely competitive, does not prove their point. According to *Money* magazine, the lowest interest rate people who pay their bills in full can get is 11.4 percent. You may think you're getting a bargain when you see those "5.9 percent APR" offers, but the catch is that they boost the rate after a few months.

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AND SPEAKING OF DEMOCRATS selling out, there is no better example than House Democrats who almost succeeded in torpedoing a bill to save Amtrak because their union supporters didn't like a provision that would end up to six years of severance pay for employees who lose their jobs because there is no longer enough for them to do. Amtrak is caught in a vise between its 21,200 union members who cling to outmoded work rules and excessive wages, and its critics like Robert J. Samuelson, who insist that it make a profit or be allowed to go under. Samuelson recently wrote that Amtrak's ridership is "stagnant." His proof: "It was 16.6 million passengers ... in its first full year; in 1996 it was 19.7 million." Pardon me, but isn't that an increase of 3.1 million?

• • • • • • • •

WHAT DO YOU THINK "HUSH kits" are? Something you give to parents of infant children? Or perhaps distributed by the White House to potential witnesses before grand juries and congressional committees? No, none of the above. They are used to muffle the noise made by jet engines. Among the planes that need them are the 600 DC-9's owned by U.S. airlines. Roughly a third of the planes have been equipped with hush kits made by ABS Partnership. There's one problem with the kits, according to air-safety expert Peter Friedman: They don't fit properly on the Pratt & Whitney engine that powers the DC-9. A bad fit could cause a tailpipe door to fly open or fly free and knock off the plane's tail. In either case, the plane would crash. The airlines and the FAA say they aren't worried. Why then did they have, according to reporter Willy Stern, a closed door meeting in Kansas City last September "to discuss DC-9 hush kit issues"?

• • • • • • • •

"REPORTS TELL HOW D.C. GOVERNMENT FAILINGS AFFECT LIVES" was the headline above a recent article in *The Washington Post* by Vernon Loeb. Why aren't there more stories like this? Far too much reporting is devoted to stories of waste, fraud, inefficiency, and corruption that fail to show the impact of the apparent scandals on people's lives. Isn't that impact what really counts the most—from the irritation of long waits in multiple lines just to arrange a driver's test and have one's vision checked to the life-threatening wait for an ambulance that takes twice as long as it should to reach your side?

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SPEAKING OF SAFETY ISSUES, THE Federal Railroad Administration recently issued a report confirming the concerns we expressed in our October issue about safety practices of CSX. CSX then hired the FRA's

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safety chief. Let's hope that means a real commitment to safety and not an effort to silence a critic.

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SPEAKING OF THIS CITY, IT'S clear that the D.C. control board, even though it's now been going for more than two years, is a long way from straightening out our local government. I suspect the reason for this failure is that no one wants to face the large number of marginal employees in the city government. The control board keeps saying the problem is one of management. Managers are part of the problem—too many chiefs too many of whom are less than able, which means that the good city employees suffer for being badly led. But an even bigger problem is that there are too few good employees. Many are incompetent; many more are mediocre.

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IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE FLOOD of lawsuits might ebb, that the steady growth of litigation in our society might cease? I'm delighted to report that there is indeed a glimmer of hope. The reason is that an increasingly large number of lawyers don't have time to file suits. They're too busy writing novels.

Inspired by the success of Scott Turow, John Grisham, and David Baldacci, "thousands of lawyers are carrying novels-in-progress in their briefcases," according to *The Washington Post*'s David Segal. At Covington & Burling, Segal found "no fewer than five attorneys" writing fiction.

Why this burst of creativity? David Baldacci offers this explanation: "The majority of lawyers are disillusioned with their practice or fed up with the law. It's a tough job and a lot of people get into it without realizing what it's all about. If the work didn't pay pretty well, there wouldn't be many attorneys out there."

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THE MOST COMMON COMPLAINT from our readers is that we ask them to renew almost as soon as they have subscribed. The reason we do this is that we need the money. Because we started out under-capitalized and don't get much corporate advertising and don't even seek cigarette or liquor ads, poverty is the great constant of our life. I too would be irritated by the too-quick renewal notices. But I hope now that you understand, you'll send your check as quickly as your own circumstances permit.

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THE CLINTON WHITE HOUSE'S ignorance of what the government is doing has been a major concern of this magazine. The reason is that having a policy carried out in the right way is just as important as having the right policy. But Clinton has seemed much more interested in the formulation of policy than in its implementation. Time and again, we learn how little the White House knows about what executive agencies like the FBI and the IRS have been doing.

Now we learn they don't even know what's going on in the White House itself. Of the White House communications agency, former Deputy Chief of Staff Harold Ickes says, "I knew little about it." But it wasn't just a couple of guys standing around. It was 850 people, by a considerable margin, as Michelle Cottle points out in her article beginning on page 10, the largest group of White House employees.

What drives me around the bend is that we are wasting money on having these people take home movies of White House social events—money that could be used for employees who are really needed. The addition of even 100 of the right kind of employees at the Office of Management and Budget could significantly improve its ability to serve as the eyes and ears the president so desperately needs, but doesn't seem to want.

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Silent Witness

Senate investigators never called the one man who could clear up the Babbitt case

BY SAMUEL SEIDEL

WHEN THE SENATE GOVERNMENTAL Affairs Committee called Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to testify in its campaign finance hearings this October, it looked as though Republicans might have at long last found a smoking gun in the Democratic fund-raising controversy. For all of the arduous testimony the committee had sat through in the preceding months, for all of the legions of White House lawyers and Democratic campaign donors who had been paraded before the dais, no one set of circumstances reeked so thoroughly of campaign contributions buying political influence as the Babbitt case.

The committee's line of inquiry was clear enough: Had Babbitt, on behalf of a major Democratic fund-raiser, denied a 1994 petition by a group of Chippewa Indian tribes to launch a gaming operation in Western Wisconsin? But what emerged from Babbitt's testimony—and from the circumstances surrounding the committee's handling of the issue—says as much about the politics of the hearings as about Bruce Babbitt's guilt or innocence.

At the heart of the matter was a failing dog track located in the small town of Hudson, Wisc., right on the Minnesota border. Although the land was some 100 miles from their respective reservations, three tribes of Wisconsin Chippewa Indians were seeking to acquire the facility and turn it into a gambling casino. Just 30 miles outside Minneapolis-St. Paul, the planned casino was expected to draw patrons from all over the Twin Cities. Before they could start building, however, the Chippewa had to convince the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to take the land into a trusteeship for them, and then issue them a gaming permit as outlined under Section 20 of the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Arguing that, because of its location, the Hudson site would prove much more profitable than the gaming facilities the tribes were currently operating on more remote tribal lands, the Chippewa convinced the regional BIA office to support their cause. On November 14, 1994, the bureau's Minneapolis office sent a memo to the assistant secretary for Indian Affairs in Washington, recommending that the tribes be granted the land in trust.

Of course, not everyone was in favor of the new casino. Allied against the petition was a group of five rival tribes that already operated gaming facilities in the region. Representing this group was lobbyist Patrick O'Connor, a former treasurer of the Democratic National Committee, and long-time fund-raiser for the party. For their part, the Chippewa hired an equally big gun, lobbyist Paul Eckstein, a former Harvard Law chum of Secretary Bruce Babbitt's. While O'Connor was busy arranging for his clients to make $230,000 worth of contributions to the DNC—donated sometime after the ruling was made public—Eckstein was pushing for face time with his good buddy Babbitt. On July 14, 1995, the day the decision memo was released by the BIA, Eckstein was at the Interior Department, urging officials to delay a decision on the Hudson track. He sought out his former classmate and asked for a quick meeting with the secretary. "Against [his] better judgment," Babbitt said later, he acceded. In his testimony before the Senate committee, Eckstein said he pressed the secretary for a delay in the matter, but that Babbitt demurred, confiding that he was under pressure to rule on the petition by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Harold Ickes. That same day, the heads of the three tribes received a letter from the deputy assistant secretary for Indian Affairs, a political appointee by the name of Michael Anderson, informing them that

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BIA was refusing their request.

By October 30, 1997, GOP senators were looking to draw blood. Following months of miscues and failed attacks, they finally had a ripe target—a Cabinet secretary who had, to their minds, ordered a lower-level official to change a ruling to benefit large party donors.

In his appearance before the committee, Babbitt offered an unimpressive defense. Although insisting that "[he] did not personally make the decision to deny the Hudson application, nor did [he] participate in department deliberations relating to the application," the secretary did admit invoking Ickes' name in the matter as a way to get Eckstein out of his hair and out of his office. Babbitt recounted what transpired at his meeting with Eckstein this way: " ... I sought to terminate the meeting. I do not recall exactly what was said. On reflection, I probably said that Mr. Ickes ... wanted the department to decide the matter promptly." Babbitt's explanation, although not exactly a corroboration of Eckstein's accusation, also wasn't exactly a clear refutation; and it sounded suspiciously like the political non-denials employed so frequently in congressional testimony. Compounding the appearance of misdeeds, in the July 14, 1995-entry in the day planner of Patrick O'Connor, Senate investigators had discovered the notation: "[Discussion] re necessity to follow up with Harold Ickes ... outlining fund-raising strategies."

With these two salient pieces of information—Babbitt's words to Eckstein and O'Connor's note on his calendar—Democratic wrongdoing seemed more than probable. Sen. Pete Domenici put it bluntly, "What is most plausible [is that Harold Ickes and the Democratic National Committee] were involved in pushing somebody not to issue this permit."

Babbitt's behavior looked pretty suspicious. Caught in a his-word-against-mine situation, Babbitt, as a political appointee, has a compelling interest in protecting the White House. One doesn't have to be a die-hard Republican to see GOP Sen. Robert Bennett's side of things when he claimed to be having "a hard time believing a pure and chaste decision was made."

But the committee didn't have to take Babbitt's word for it. During his testimony, Babbitt revealed that a career civil servant, George Skibine, had made the final recommendation regarding the controversial petition. It was based upon this recommendation that the deputy assistant secretary, Michael Anderson, had sent the Chippewa the letter of refusal.

Here was the break Republicans had been searching for. If a smoking gun existed in this matter, Skibine held it. Forget Babbitt's testimony; the committee needed to ask Skibine—the guy who made the actual recommendation on the petition—whether he was influenced or pressured in any way. And was he aware of potential contributions to the DNC by the group of tribes opposing the petition? Yet remarkably, the committee never bothered to contact Skibine.

Of course, Senate investigators are seasoned professionals, and they may have felt that such a direct line of inquiry was too obvious to pursue. Here at *The Washington Monthly*, however, we have no such qualms. So we contacted Skibine in November and asked if he had been influenced in any way when submitting his recommendation on the Chippewa's request. His response: an unequivocal "No." Had the bureau's final position concurred with his? "Yes." Had he been made aware at any time of potential contributions to the Democratic party based on his decision? "No." Bottom line: Skibine insists that his recommendation was made entirely on the merits—or lack thereof—of the tribes' petition. (As it turns out, the opposing tribes weren't the only people against the casino. Both the town of Hudson and the nearby community of Troy had come out against allowing gaming in the area, as had Wisconsin Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson and the Wisconsin and Minnesota delegations in Congress.)

When asked why they never deposed Skibine, the Senate committee insisted that, underlings aside, the buck stops with Babbitt. But if they had truly been interested in determining how Babbitt was exercising his responsibility (i.e., if he had indeed simply ratified the independent decision of a department staffer), the Senate definitely needed Skibine's testimony. Of course, the committee's "buck-stops" explanation also fails to take into account that the committee had, in fact, deposed Skibine's superior, Michael Anderson. In a sworn statement, Anderson told the majority staff that neither lobbyists, DNC officials, nor anyone from the White House had in any way affected his opinion on the Hudson issue; that Skibine had independently drafted the letter containing the BIA's ruling—and that the BIA had approved only one Section-20 request since the law went into effect in 1988.

Considering how inconvenient Anderson's statement would have proven for Republicans peddling the Babbitt-Ickes conspiracy theory, it's no surprise that Anderson was never called before the committee—despite an appeal by the minority staff for his testimony. It also sheds light on why Skibine's testimony was of absolutely no interest to Republican investigators. Nonetheless, Skibine was without doubt the key figure in this little drama—as Babbitt made clear in his testimony. Too bad the press and public seemed content to accept only the part of the story the Republicans fed them. ●

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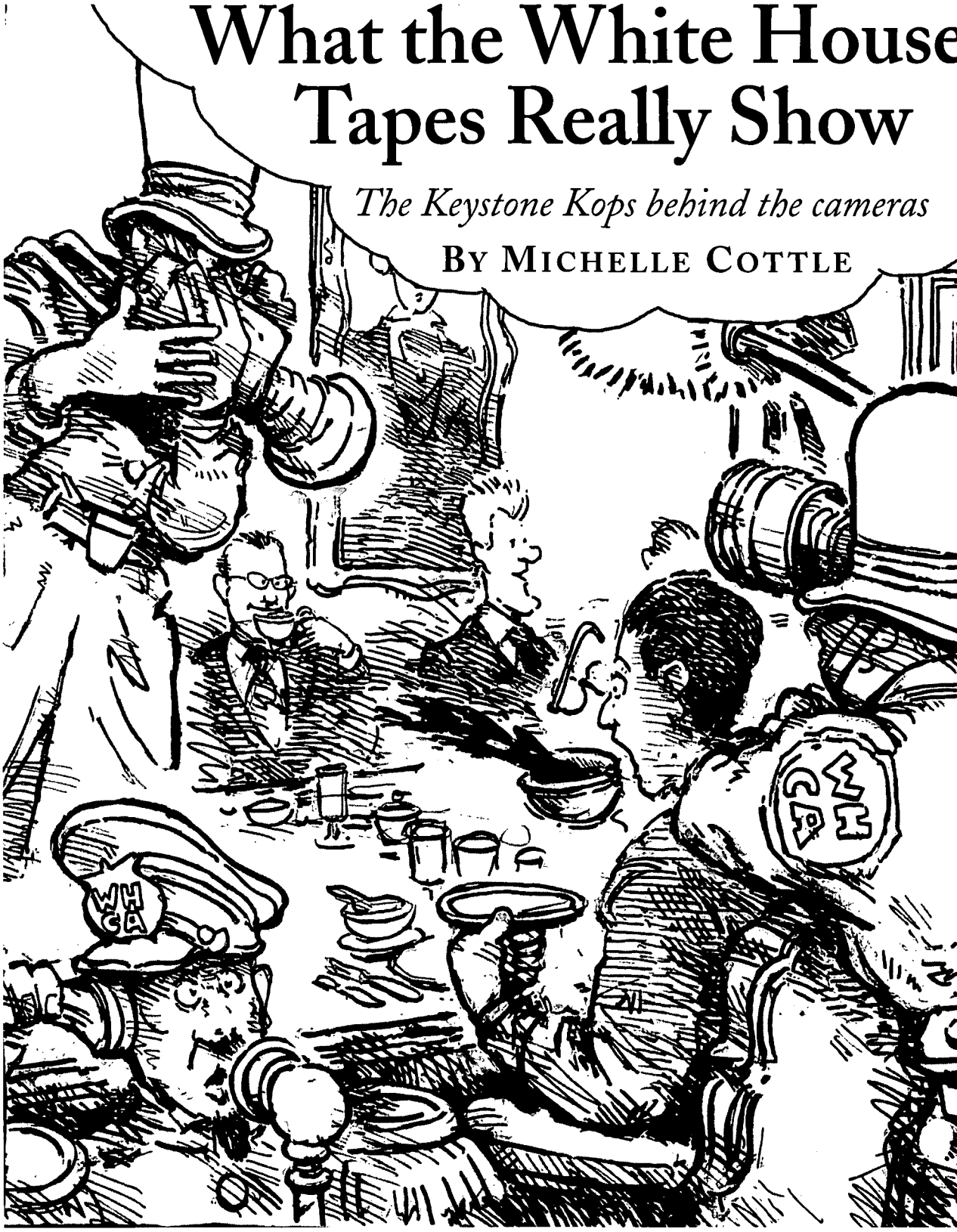
What the White House Tapes Really Show

The Keystone Kops behind the cameras

BY MICHELLE COTTLE



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ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A tiny organization within the United States War Department known as the White House Signal Detachment. Created in December 1941 by President Franklin Roosevelt, the White House Signal Detachment wasn't even a real agency for the first three months of its life. Rather, it was an unofficial collection of 32 members of the U.S. Army whose low-profile mission was to provide secure lines of communication for the president during World War II. Officially activated in March 1942, WHSD has since undergone two name changes and a couple of shifts in oversight. Today, the White House Communications Agency (WHCA), as it has been known since 1962, is a "joint service agency" staffed by all branches of the armed forces, as well as a handful of civilians.

As is the case with the entire executive branch over the past five decades, the White House Communications Agency—dubbed "Wocka" by White House aides and the press corps—has grown in both mission and size. By 1978, WHCA's stated duty had become "to provide telecommunications and other related support to the president of the United States and to other elements related to the president." Sounds relatively straightforward. Upon closer examination, however, one learns that those "related" elements include services for "the vice president, the National Security Council, the president's staff, the First Family, the Secret Service, and others as directed." Today, this mandate entails, among other things: toting the presidential seal, American flags, and bulletproof podium around the country for the president's public appearances; manning the switchboards at the White House; developing and printing photos of the president and first lady; providing stenographic services for the White House press secretary; videotaping key events of the presidency for the National Archives; and, of course, ensuring that, wherever he goes and whenever he gets there, the leader of the United States of America has "dependable means by which to communicate instantly with individuals anywhere in the world at any moment."

As one might expect, such an increase in responsibilities has required a comparable increase in staff. During the Bush years, the agency hit a personnel peak of 1,017. Since 1991, this number has gradually

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declined, and today WHCA employs a mere 854 personnel. In 1996, its budget topped $120 million, all of which came out of the Defense Department's coffers.

Although staffed and funded through the Pentagon's Defense Information Systems Agency, WHCA takes its marching orders from the White House, under the auspices of the White House Military Office. (Stay with me here, these layers of command will be important later on.) Downsizing notwithstanding, WHCA remains the single largest agency overseen by the Executive Office of the President. The Office of Management and Budget, commonly thought to be the largest, runs a pale second with 520 employees.

Despite WHCA's considerable bulk, however, this 800-pound gorilla has operated with little attention from either its Defense Department or White House masters. (Which helps explain why no one really knows when the White House assigned WHCA all those "other related" duties mentioned in the agency's 1978 mission statement.) The agency's basic tasks have been reviewed only three times since its inception, and it escaped formal audit until a defense department review two years ago. The November 1995 report on phase one of the audit cited "no evidence of significant theft or significant waste" in WHCA, but noted several areas in need of "management attention." Among these: WHCA was annually performing $78 million worth of tasks beyond the scope of its mission; it was unable to account for more than half a million dollars worth of agency property; and it was paying close to $800,000 to lease superfluous equipment. The April 1996 phase-two report concluded that WHCA was receiving "little or no oversight of budgeting, acquisition planning, and organizational effectiveness," and recommended that the DoD's oversight role be strengthened. The following June, WHCA representatives testified before a congressional subcommittee that the agency was taking steps to address the audit's criticisms. And after only a couple of unflattering media blips, WHCA sank back into relative anonymity.

Then came The Coffees.

Didn't the president or someone on his staff ever question the wisdom of having Bill Clinton's years in office memorialized as a never-ending kiss-up to checkbook-swinging fat cats?

"Wocka" Is Watching

Time magazine was credited with breaking the story. On October 4 of this year, deep into the Senate hearings on campaign finance reform, the Clinton administration turned over to investigators "belatedly discovered" videotapes of the infamous White House coffees. Within days, the White House Communications Agency, the unfortunate maker and keeper of the tapes, found itself under siege from all sides. Why hadn't the agency responded to previous committee inquiries regarding taped events? Why had WHCA ignored a memo from the White House requesting all videos of coffees and political events? Attorney General Janet Reno was furious. President Clinton said he was even more furious. And Senate Committee Chairman Fred Thompson and his Republican cohorts were downright apoplectic. Having requested all pertinent information on the events months earlier, GOP lawmakers charged that this delay in producing the tapes was another example of the administration's obstructionist "foot-dragging."

As the news media detailed the furious finger-pointing, what emerged read more like a comedy of errors than a grand conspiracy: The White House had sent a memo to WHCA in April, but part of the memo hadn't gotten distributed by the White House Military Office, so WHCA officials didn't know the White House wanted the database searched specifically for coffee footage, and certainly nobody at WHCA had thought to query the database using the keyword "coffee."

The question of whether this apparent display of stunning incompetence was in fact intentional will likely be debated along partisan lines for years to come. (Expect conspiracy don Christopher Ruddy to come out with the FBI-files/Rose-billing-records/WHCA-videos conspiracy thrillogy next spring.) But an even more basic—if somewhat less politically gripping—question is likely to remain unexplored: What in the hell were WHCA camera crews doing at those coffees to begin with?

The agency's stated reason for attending the events sounds benign enough: The duties of the White

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House Communications Agency include videotaping "key" moments in the presidency for posterity. But while this may be a valid explanation for WHCA crews' tailing the president to peace conferences and fluttering around him during state dinners, it still begs the question of why they were on hand for DNC fund-raisers and White House love-ins with big-money donors. The agency is, after all, under operational control of the White House, and senior White House aides are, in fact, the folks who arrange for WHCA coverage of an event. Didn't the president or someone on his staff ever question the wisdom of having Bill Clinton's years in office memorialized as a never-ending kiss-up to checkbook-swinging fat cats? Granted, fund-raising is fast becoming the primary activity—and defining skill—of America's elected officials. But to preserve in Technicolor detail the pathetic realities of today's political money-grub is hardly a shrewd move for a guy supposedly obsessed with his presidential "legacy."

A handful of explanations for WHCA's videotaping the coffees comes to mind. One, President Clinton wanted them there. After five years in the Oval Office, Clinton's judgment may have been so eroded by all of the bowing and scraping that accompany the job, that he came to assume any move he made merited video documentation. (At last count, footage of 44 coffees and more than 200 fund-raisers had been turned over to congressional investigators.)

Alternatively, with the end of the Cold War, perhaps the DoD is so desperate for something to do that it concocted a variety of make-work tasks for military personnel—a kind of workfare for the enlisted set—and asked President Clinton to go along. Or perhaps WHCA itself, in a classic bureaucratic attempt to protect its share of the defense-funding pie, kept offering to take on additional duties, and the White House obligingly piled them on. Permanently cowed where the Pentagon is concerned by that unpleasant "draft-dodger" label, Clinton is unlikely to deny the military anything its little heart desires. (Not to mention that WHCA provides the Executive Office of the President 850 additional staffers, while allowing the White House to keep its own budget and personnel numbers respectably low.)

An equally plausible scenario is that Clinton never thought twice about the cameras being there—that he is so accustomed to being shadowed by the video crews that he no longer notices when they're around. (See page 14 for why this isn't as absurd as it seems.) This, at least, was the impression given by former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Harold Ickes in his October testimony before Congress concerning the WHCA incident. When asked about the agency's function, Ickes' responded: "I'm fortunate, I think, that I know little about it. They were around a great deal of time to the extent that those of us traveling with, or with the president in meetings or otherwise, came not to even notice them, quite frankly.... My understanding [is] that they were a unit of the United States military and that their function is to record ... certain events and certain statements by the president. I don't know when they are called. I don't know what the criteria is for what they film and what they take on audio. All I know is they were there, and they were there quite frequently, but not all the time." Ickes' offered similar insight into the workings of WHCA's operational overseer, the White House Military Office: "There is a military unit in the EOP [Executive Office of the President]. I don't know

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how it is structured. I don't know who it reports to. And I don't know from whom it takes its orders, quite frankly." (Hardly a promising sign from the folks who promised to thoroughly evaluate and "reinvent" the federal government.)

One might get the impression from Ickes' statement that, despite its size—and considering the sad lack of attention it has received over the years—WHCA has never been very important to anyone in the White House. One would be wrong. If anything, the agency's low profile was once a sign of the exact opposite. As a part of the even lower-profile White House Military Office, WHCA has long been among the most bizarre and the least understood government agencies. From the Eisenhower administration up through Reagan, WHCA's overseer, the White House Military Office, is known to have controlled a multimillion-dollar secret fund (maintained ostensibly for the construction of presidential bomb shelters) into which the president could dip any time and for any purpose he so desired. The various abuses of this fund—including JFK's upgrading family properties, President Johnson's spending millions to improve the wiring and plumbing at his Texas ranch, Nixon's using half a million for a swimming pool at Camp David—are outlined in the 1980 book *Breaking Cover*, by former WHMO Director Bill Gulley. The White House Military Office simply hid any expenditure the president did not want examined by "classifying" it as a matter of "presidential security," said Gulley, who noted that WHCA personnel were frequently employed for these "classified" projects. For example, from the time he left office until six months *after* his death, LBJ had a dozen WHCA staffers down at his ranch—compliments of the WHMO fund. The book also includes memos documenting WHCA's setting up of LBJ's secret taping system. Wrote Gulley, "It's no exaggeration to say [the Military Office is] the President's Aladdin's lamp: there's nothing that can't be done, and there's a bottomless pit of money, ingenuity, and resources to do it with." When *Breaking Cover* was released in 1980, the Reagan White House admitted to the existence of the secret fund—which had survived undetected throughout the uproar and paranoid aftermath of Watergate—but vowed that the Gipper would never dream of misusing it. WHMO and the White House Counsel's Office have been unavailable for comment on the current status of the fund.

Today, the administration remains very protective where WHCA and WHMO are concerned. In March of 1994, Congress asked the General Account-

Life Inside The Bubble

The lack of interest and knowledge displayed within the president's inner circle about such an omnipresent entity as WHCA may sound a bit odd. But, hey, the White House is an odd place, and the people who occupy it inhabit a different kind of reality. In his 1992 book, *What it Takes*, Richard Ben Cramer captures the artificial existence to which George Bush—at the time vice president—had grown accustomed by his second term:

> No one who hadn't lived in the bubble could know what it was like: ... the minute-by-minute schedule, instructing him where to stand, whom to greet; the men in suits and earplugs, always around, talking into their wrist microphones; the men in slightly better suits, handing him typed pages, telling him where he'd be going and whom he would see, who his friends were among the crowd and what he was supposed to tell those friends, what the press would be asking and what he ought to say in response; the simple, awesome fact that from the moment he opened his door in the morning until he retired for the night, no matter what he chose to do, or where he went, or what he wanted, he would *never* be alone.

Bill Clinton's existence for the past five years has been, if anything, even more unreal. As president of the United States, he is arguably the most powerful man in the world. He is also, by the nature of the job today, one of the nation's biggest celebrities—a role that only isolates him further. And although on one level, it seems unavoidable that The President be insulated from the rest of the country; on another, such isolation seems untenable. If the president exists in a bubble, how can he really know what's going on in the nation—and by extension, what needs to be done? Moreover, without a strong desire to reach beyond his artificial environment, the president can lose touch with what is going on even within his own government, addressing only those issues that are allowed to enter his world by an army of aides and assistants. Over the years, various leaders have responded differently to such isolation. Eleanor Roosevelt and former AP reporter Lorena Hickock were but two of the numerous sets of eyes FDR sent into the trenches to

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ing Office to look into the agency's management and finances. Although the GAO's preliminary inquiries raised concerns about, among other issues, WHCA's budgeting policies, investigators were barred from pursuing the matter by the White House. As the GAO's Assistant Comptroller Henry L. Hinton Jr. later told the House subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs, and Criminal Justice, "[O]n three occasions in May, June, and August 1994, DoD representatives advised us that the White House had prohibited DoD contact with GAO or release of DoD data." The GAO pursued the matter, said Hinton, and "during a January 1995 meeting with DoD and White House staff, White House Counsel staff indicated that we would not be provided the information needed to further pursue these issues." The White House explained that its denial of the GAO's request was because WHCA operations involved matters of "presidential protection."

In February 1995, an agreement was finally reached whereby the Defense Department's Inspector General would conduct an audit of WHCA. But even then, the White House kept an eye on the proceedings. In the 1996 follow-up hearings, the House Subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs, and Criminal Justice requested testimony from the head of WHMO, presidential appointee Alan Sullivan. The White House Counsel's office wrote a letter seeking to block Sullivan's appearance. In Sullivan's stead went WHCA Commander Col. Joseph Simmons. But even Simmons' testimony proved controversial. He first submitted a prepared statement indicating that "WHMO provides operational direction and control to the WHCA. ... The director of the WHMO prepares annual officer evaluation reports for the commander [of] WHCA, and the White House Chief of Staff is the reviewing official." He then submitted a second statement from which this reference to the White House's oversight role had been deleted. The change had been made upon recommendation from someone who had reviewed the document, Simmons told the subcommittee, although he could not say precisely whom. Democrats chalked the incident up to a simple editing decision. Republicans saw it as the White House's attempts to distance itself from the agency.

gather information on the progress of administration projects such as the WPA. President Truman reportedly sent people out to drive around the country and talk with the public. By contrast, in more recent years, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush were all famously incurious about what was transpiring in the world outside.

Of course, the bubble can have a very real protective value, allowing the president to maintain plausible deniability regarding any "mishaps" that may occur on his watch. (Remember Reagan's professed ignorance regarding the Iran-Contra affair?) The Clinton administration may well be hoping to absolve itself of guilt regarding the WHCA videotapes by maintaining that no one really paid much attention to the agency's activities. Oh, they have some vague sense of what the agency does. But that's about as far as it goes. If this is the case, however, it simply points up a sad truth about the lack of interest—intentional or not—that most presidents have in the way the bureaucracy around them is functioning. It would almost be less disheartening to think that the White House was up to a few dirty tricks, but that at least it knew what was going on inside its own government.

The Hunt For "Wocka"

The administration's apparent evasions on WHCA, along with the nature and history of the agency, bring up the very real possibility that the White House is not at all ignorant of the agency's operations. Congressional Republicans certainly suspect as much, and the recent videotape fiasco has spurred a movement to launch hearings by early spring into the perceived abuses of WHCA. (Rep. Mark Souder says such hearings would have begun yesterday if he had his druthers.) But the public shouldn't expect *too* much from a congressional inquiry. WHCA has made a career of operating under the radar, and Congress will be hard-pressed to breach the walls of "presidential security" surrounding the agency. As Congressman Souder admits, right around the time last year that House members were hearing testimony on the appropriateness of WHCA's oversight and operations, WHCA video crews were—unbeknownst to the subcommittee—busy working the coffee/fund-raiser circuit.

As for the agency's colorful history, when approached for this article, staffers of the House subcommittee that ran last year's WHCA hearings expressed total surprise at the agency's past connection to WHMO's secret fund, or indeed that the fund had ever existed. "I don't know anything about that," says Majority Staff Director Robert Charles. "You say you read about it in a book? What is the name of it? Can I get the pages faxed to me?"

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Memo of the Month

HIAA

Health Insurance Association of America

MEMO

DATE: October 22, 1997

TO: Michael Fortier

FROM: Melody Harned

SUBJECT: Government Run Healthcare

The message we are getting from House and Senate Leadership is that we are in a war and need to start fighting like we're in a war.

Republican Leadership is now engaged on this issue and is issuing strong directives to all players in the insurance and employer community to get activated. Earlier this week, I met with Keith Hennessey (Sen. Lott) along with the NFIB coalition. Hennessey will be working with House and Senate leadership to coordinate the advocacy effort. Senator Lott is well aware of the issue of mandates, incremental health care reform, etc., and is very concerned. Lott told Senator Jeffords that he could not introduce his "Quality Bill" this session and was advised to work less with Sen. Kennedy and more with his fellow Republicans on the Senate Labor Committee. Sen. Lott has also spoken with all Republicans on the Senate Labor Committee and told them to get involved and express their concerns. Sen. Lott also said that Senate Republicans need a lot of help from their friends on the outside, "Get off your butts, get off your wallets." Keith Hennessey believes that it is critical that employer/insurer grassroots occur during recess (Nov & Dec) so that Members are prepared when they come back to town in January.

At the NFIB Coalition meeting today, Mark Isokowitz (NFIB) informed the group that he had been summoned to the Hill by Missy Jenkins (Rep. Gingrich), Dean Clancy (Rep. Armey), Stacey Hughes (Sen. Nickles) and Keith Hennessey (Sen. Lott). Staff gave him four directives to take back to the coalition: 1.) Hold a briefing for Republican health LAs in 2 weeks; 2.) Implement heavy grassroots during recess; 3.) Meet with groups of Senators (e.g., Sen. Coverdell health care coalition) to report on what each organization is doing to fight these bills; and 4.) Write the definitive piece of paper trashing all these bills. Mark Isokowitz's overall impression from the meeting was that the Leadership was looking for signs of serious commitment on our part before they go out on a limb.

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National Security For Sale

How our obsession with privatizing government has left us vulnerable to nuclear terrorism

BY NURITH C. AIZENMAN

IN NOVEMBER OF 1991, THOMAS NEFF HAD a stroke of genius. A year earlier, the once-fearsome Soviet empire had abruptly collapsed into a heap of disordered republics; and while this epic event was greeted with sighs of relief by most Americans, nuclear proliferation experts like Neff, a professor at M.I.T., knew better than to pop open the champagne just yet. True, the prospects of a nuclear armageddon with Russia had never been more remote—particularly since, as a result of the START I and II treaties, Russia was already in the process of dismantling 80 percent of its nuclear arsenal. But this good news also had a dark side: once the nuclear warheads were taken apart, the bomb-grade uranium inside would be more vulnerable to theft. Meanwhile, hundreds of tons of bomb-grade uranium in Russia's existing stockpile lay scattered across the country in insecure storage sites—guarded, if at all, by demoralized soldiers and nuclear workers who in many instances had not been paid, or even fed, by the cash-strapped Russian government in months. Given the small quantity of enriched uranium required to build a nuclear bomb, the possibilities for disaster seemed limitless: a terrorist group might break into one of the many nuclear warehouses that lacked even rudimentary electronic detection systems and make off with enough uranium to blow up Manhattan. A starving soldier might sneak home a few handfuls of the stuff to sell on the black market—where it could be snapped up by eager buyers from Iraq, Iran or North Korea. A highly trained, but unemployed nuclear worker might be forced to make ends meet by going to work for one of those rogue nations. And most disturbing of all, in a quest for hard currency, the Russian government might itself be moved to sell wholesale quantities of nuclear material to the highest bidder. (In fact, in 1995 evidence surfaced that the head of Russia's Ministry of Atomic Energy, Victor Mikhailov, was trying to reach just such an arrangement with Iran).

Which brings us to Neff's ingenious proposal. Although of high, bomb-grade quality, the uranium from Russia's dismantled warheads could potentially be diluted into the lower grade kind used to fuel nuclear power reactors. And the U.S. government was already in the business of producing and selling such fuel to nearly all of the commercial nuclear power plants in the U.S. as well as one-third of those abroad. So instead of producing all of that nuclear fuel in our own facilities, Neff reasoned, why not buy a portion of it from the Russians. From the American point of view, the arrangement would cost nothing because we could still get the Russian material at a lower price than we'd be re-selling it to the power plants. Meanwhile, the Russians would receive a desperately needed infusion of cold cash—a good chunk of which could be used to improve the security of their remaining nuclear stockpile. In addition, thousands of Russia's dangerously idle nuclear workers would once more be gainfully employed, this time in re-processing the bomb-grade uranium. Best of all, huge quantities of deadly Russian nuclear material would be moved beyond the reach of would-be bomb-makers.

It took some prodding, but the U.S. government, first under President Bush and then under Clinton, eventually took up Neff's plan. By August of 1992, the United States and Russia had reached a tentative agreement: Over the next 20 years, the United States would

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pay Russia about $12 billion for the reprocessed uranium derived from 500 metric tons of nuclear material from its warheads—40 percent of Russia's total supply of bomb-grade uranium and enough to destroy Hiroshima 25,000 times over.

The Russian uranium deal was, as its advocates have noted, a classic conversion of swords into plowshares. It ought to have been a crowning achievement of America's post-cold war foreign policy. But this is Washington, where even the brightest ideas can be clouded by muddy thinking. And unfortunately for the deal, at the same time that the United States and Russia were hammering out its specifics, proponents of privatizing government were gaining bipartisan support for a plan to sell off Uncle Sam's uranium production business. Thus the privatization scheme and the swords-into-plowshares deal evolved in tandem—intertwined from the very start. And the unhappy impact of the former on the latter provides an instructive—and depressing—example of how a knee-jerk commitment to privatizing government can seriously compromise America's national interests.

A Private Matter

The notion that the private sector can run just about anything more efficiently and effectively than the federal government was well on its way to becoming international gospel by the early 1990s. In Western Europe, hundreds of billions of dollars worth of government enterprises ranging from telephone companies to steel mills were put on the auction block. The privatization wave attracted a strong following in the United States as well. However, in contrast to Europe, most major services in the U.S. were already handled by private industry. Undaunted, the privatization advocates found themselves a juicy target. "They were trying to think of something that no one else had thought of," Clinton's former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Joseph Stiglitz explains only half-jokingly, "and then someone had a brilliant idea: Why not privatize the making of atomic bombs—or at least the processing of the uranium that goes into atomic bombs? And they were right, no one else had thought of that!"

To be sure, the government's uranium production program had room for improvement. For example, the Department of Energy had continued to build a new processing plant for several years after it became apparent that the facility would be unnecessary—spending $3 million before the project was finally abandoned. The government was also encumbered by various requirements, for instance that it follow federal procurement rules, and that it apply to Congress for appropriated funds every year. This made the government's uranium processing business vulnerable to foreign competition. By the 1980s the U.S. world market share had declined precipitously from the near 100 percent of its heyday to less than 50 percent.

This downturn was of particular concern to two powerful Republican legislators: Sen. Wendell Ford of Kentucky feared that it might lead to pay cuts or even layoffs at the large uranium processing plant the government operates in his home state; New Mexico Sen. Pete Domenici worried that as more and more uranium production moved overseas, the large number of uranium mines in his state would suffer. Domenici and Ford concluded that the solution was to make the government's uranium business more competitive by handing it over to private owners. And as high-ranking members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, they were in a position to put their plan into action.

In the 1992 Energy Policy Act—passed less than two months after the United States and Russia had reached their preliminary agreement on the swords-into-plowshares deal—Congress directed the Department of Energy to transfer its uranium production activities to a newly created semi-governmental company, dubbed the United States Enrichment Corporation, or USEC, which would be charged with preparing itself for full privatization. The president would have the power to hire and fire USEC's board of directors. However in every other respect the company's employees would be autonomous from the government. As a further step towards privatization, USEC was also freed from many of the obligations that had been hampering the government's program. And sure enough, the result was that by September of 1994, USEC was able to boast of achieving an "all-time enrichment production record" at both of its processing plants.

So far so good, right? Not really. Economists note that even if a privatized USEC does become more efficient, it's questionable whether those savings will filter down to American nuclear power consumers: With an almost total monopoly on nuclear fuel production in the U.S., USEC would have little reason to lower its prices. So even on its own merits USEC is hardly a model candidate for privatization.

But even worse, USEC's privatization could deal a devastating blow to the vital swords-into-plowshares agreement with Russia. Recall that the whole idea behind the deal was to make it "budget neutral" by reselling the processed uranium purchased from the Russians to commercial nuclear power companies. And since USEC

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inherited the government's long-term contracts with nearly all American and over one-third of the world's power plants, it would be difficult for the Russian deal to be implemented unless USEC were charged with carrying it out. Thus, even before it was officially created, USEC was envisioned by the Bush administration as the deal's exclusive executor. But whereas the government's chief objective is to get as much bomb-grade uranium as possible out of Russia without losing money, as a private corporation, USEC's interest—in fact its fiduciary obligation to its shareholders—would be to maximize its profits. The billion dollar question, then, was whether USEC would be able to do so while still fulfilling the goals of the swords-into-plowshares deal. Or, to put it more starkly, would USEC's profit motive conflict with American national security interests?

The Deployment

One month after Clinton took office, the U.S. and Russian governments officially signed off on the swords-into-plowshares deal: Over the course of the next five years the United States would purchase the diluted uranium from 10 metric tons worth of bomb-grade Russian material a year; for the next 15 years after that, the United States would buy at least 30 tons a year. However it was left to USEC's management team to work out the rest of the details—including the price to be paid for the uranium—with the Russians. By January 1994 USEC completed those negotiations, and the company's CEO, William Timbers, traveled to Moscow for an official contract-signing ceremony with Russia's minister of atomic energy.

The new agreement was hailed as a historic achievement and promisingly titled the "Megatons to Megawatts contract." But in reality, our former Communist adversaries had proved woefully inadequate on the battlefield of business. In the words of one source familiar with the negotiations: "We snookered them."

As Harvard professor and nuclear security specialist Richard Falkenrath has noted in a comprehensive study, the Megatons to Megawatts contract contained three potentially problematic provisions. First, while USEC was given the option of buying the Russians' uranium, the contract did not actually obligate it to do so. Second, the contract established an initial price but stipulated that it was to be renegotiated each October. Finally, whereas USEC would pay the Russians upon delivery for diluting the bomb-grade uranium themselves, it would not immediately compensate them for one of the key ingredients the Russians would have to use in the dilution process—namely, the $4 billion worth of natural uranium needed to blend down the bomb-grade uranium into the lesser-enriched kind used for nuclear fuel. USEC would pay for the natural uranium that had been added in only after the company was able to sell or use an equivalent amount from its own reserves.

The Megatons to Megawatt contract's provisions would have made perfect sense if it had strictly been a pact between the United States and Russia. Given Washington's strong interest in ensuring the success of the swords-into-plowshares deal, it would have been unlikely to take advantage of the contract's flexibility to try to fleece the Russians. Similarly, if the primary goal had been to make USEC as attractive as possible to potential buyers, the leeway afforded USEC in the contract would have been an undisputed plus. However, in light of USEC's two potentially competing missions—to maximize its profits and to implement the Russian deal—the contract's leniency provided a dangerous opportunity for mischief.

The trouble began almost as soon as the Russians and USEC sat down for their first annual price renegotiating session—held in October of 1994. USEC had calculated that, while not a money-losing proposition, buying uranium from the Russians at the initially agreed upon price was not nearly as profitable as producing it in the United States. Thus USEC sought to slash the price by nearly 20 percent. To make matters worse, USEC announced that, since U.S. trade restrictions prevented it from immediately selling an equivalent portion of the natural uranium ingredient in the diluted uranium purchased from the Russians, and since the company also deemed it unprofitable to use that equivalent portion of natural uranium in its own processing activities, USEC would be unable to pay Russia for the natural uranium ingredient until at least 2003. The Russians were furious. "This is robbery in broad daylight!" fumed Russia's minister of atomic energy, Victor Mikhailov. Mikhailov is hardly the saint in this story, but he had a point.

It soon became apparent that USEC was prepared to squeeze the Russians for every last advantage—even at the risk of causing a breakdown in negotiations, and despite the fact that this might dangerously delay the removal of literally tons of bomb-grade material from unsafe Russian storage sites. And this, in effect, is precisely what happened.

By February of 1995 the talks between USEC and the Russians had reached an impasse. From a financial point of view this was no skin off of USEC's back. However, American national security interests were clearly being compromised. And by mid-1995 outside

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critics had begun to take notice. "[T]he agreement's imminent breakdown, clearly Washington's fault, is a huge national security blunder," wrote foreign policy analyst Jessica Mathews in a *Washington Post* op-ed.

It was only after months of stalemate that Sen. Domenici—who was soon to question the wisdom of letting USEC implement the swords-into-plowshares deal—found a solution to the natural uranium problem. Rather than paying in cash, USEC would compensate the Russians with natural uranium from its own reserves, and American trade restrictions would be modified so that the Russians could sell that uranium to prospective consumers for delivery at a future date. Domenici's scheme was set forth in the 1996 USEC Privatization Act. The act, which was signed into law in April, also gave congressional approval for USEC's privatization and requested that Clinton make a final determination on the matter. All that was now needed was a nod from Clinton, and USEC could be put up for sale.

The Final Countdown

An interagency group including representatives of the National Security Council, the State Department, the Department of Energy, the National Economic Council, and the Council of Economic Advisers was convened to decide whether and when Clinton should sign off on USEC's privatization. One might have expected that, given USEC's key role in the swords-into-plowshares deal, combined with its lackluster performance as the deal's executor while still a semi-governmental corporation, the national security folks might be dead set against turning the company over to private ownership. Instead, USEC's privatization appears to have been regarded as inevitable. The only issue seriously considered was how to limit its negative impact. "People tried to deal in the art of the possible," explains one official.

Complicating the picture, by this point, anyone contemplating a halt to the privatization plan would have had to contend with an uncomfortable budgetary conundrum. The 1996 USEC Privatization Act was lumped into a larger appropriations bill called the "Down Payment Towards a Balanced Budget Act," in which USEC's impending sale was counted as a $1.3 billion gain in revenues for the federal government. This was actually something of a gimmick—at most the government would simply be getting in cash today an amount equivalent to the value of the revenues USEC would have brought in over the years were it not privatized. In fact, for just this reason, in 1987 Congress passed a budgetary law prohibiting one-time sales of government assets from being counted as revenues. But in 1995 Congress changed its budget accounting rules such that USEC could be tallied in. As a result, a ruling against USEC's privatization would have created a $1.3 billion hole in the budget—something many administration officials would be understandably loathe to do.

Yet, interestingly it was the economists at the Council of Economic Advisers—led by Stiglitz—who actually raised the possibility of vetoing USEC's privatization. The more Stiglitz analyzed the situation, the more convinced he became that privatizing USEC was folly: "You don't have to use a lot of imagination to see that the economic incentives are not there for USEC to import the Russian uranium. So you're putting something that's in our national security interests in direct conflict with USEC's private property interests."

Quite the opposite, argued William Timbers, USEC's CEO, "there is a confluence of interests between USEC and the federal government." Timbers contends that USEC has good reason to want to retain its position as sole executor of the swords-into-plowshares deal. After all, if USEC did not have the exclusive right to purchase the Russian uranium, other groups might begin buying and selling it—creating competition for USEC and possibly flooding the market with enough fuel-grade uranium to cause a nosedive in prices. And since the U.S. government has the power to remove USEC's designation as sole executor with as little as 30 days notice, USEC has a strong incentive to demonstrate that it is carrying out the swords-into-plowshares deal in accordance with American national security interests.

But Stiglitz was unconvinced. The more USEC becomes enmeshed in contracts with the Russians, the more impractical it will be for the U.S. government to yank it out of the deal. Thus the threat of losing its status as executor of the Russian deal is hardly as powerful a deterrent as Timbers implies. Furthermore, once USEC is privatized, it will be tricky to monitor it. Thus, noted Stiglitz, the company might be quietly sabotaging the uranium deal without the government's knowledge.

As if on cue, even while still a semi-governmental entity, USEC provided Stiglitz with a perfect illustration of just this scenario. At a meeting in Moscow in January of 1996, the Russians offered to sell USEC nuclear fuel from six more tons worth of bomb-grade uranium than the 12 tons USEC had already agreed to purchase in 1997. From an American national security standpoint this was great news—those six tons were enough to obliterate about 300 Hiroshimas. Had the Russians been making their offer directly to the U.S. government, the United States presumably would have jumped at the opportunity. However it was not in USEC's commercial interests to buy the extra uranium, so they declined.

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The Russian offer and USEC's refusal were reported in diplomatic cables written by U.S. embassy officials who were present at the meeting, but there are conflicting accounts as to who in the government knew about it, and whether USEC had actually gotten clearance from the Department of Energy or the White House to turn the Russians down. Charles Yulish, USEC's vice president of corporate communications, says he "can categorically state that at no time has USEC made decisions with regard to contract quantities without consultation with national security [officials]." And one government source holds that, at the time, the administration had doubts as to whether the Russians were actually capable of processing the extra uranium and feared that ordering it would give the Russians an incentive to cheat by substituting in nuclear fuel that had not been made from the uranium in dismantled weapons. But other government sources contend that this is merely a bit of revisionist history intended for public consumption—that in fact the Russians were perfectly capable of producing the extra fuel all along, and that while the State Department might have known, key officials in the Department of Energy and the National Security Council were simply unaware of both the Russian offer and USEC's refusal.

Either way, it doesn't look good. In the case of any officials who were aware, their acquiescence to USEC's actions is troubling. And in the case of those who were not aware, this raises serious questions about their fulfillment of their responsibility to monitor USEC's implementation of the Russian deal. There were, for instance, some grumbles among those familiar with his work that Dan Poneman, the point man at the National Security Council, was not sufficiently vigilant toward USEC—regarding himself more as an ally than as an overseer. Poneman insists that "my focus was always on ensuring that whatever happened on USEC privatization, the [Russian] deal was protected." In any event, the incident remained under the radar until the following July.

Early that month, the Russians once again extended their offer to sell extra uranium. And once again, USEC turned them down. The company did, however, offer the Russians a $100 million advance on the uranium it was buying. The Russians accepted the advance but were not entirely mollified. About a week later, they mentioned their frustration to a group of U.S. nuclear weapons experts who were visiting Russian facilities. The experts reported this exchange in their cables back to the U.S.

Soon afterwards, Sen. Pete Domenici learned of the affair. Although an advocate of USEC's privatization, Domenici was incensed at the company's behavior. The senator fired off an angry letter to Deputy Secretary of Energy Charles Curtis—subsequently leaked to Peter Passell of *The New York Times*—in which he expressed his conviction that "USEC is acting directly contrary to the national security interests of the United States." USEC, said Domenici, should "be immediately replaced as executive agent" of the swords-into-plowshares deal.

As word of the matter spread, so did the outrage of administration officials who felt they had been deliberately kept in the dark. "You find out that when you went to a meeting where you were supposed to be discussing whether to privatize USEC, and you were weighing these incentive issues, at least half the people at the meeting didn't even know that [USEC had refused to buy additional uranium]," explains Joseph Stiglitz. Furthermore the $100 million advance USEC had given to the Russians smacked to some of a kind of bribe to buy the Russians' silence.

At this point, Charles Curtis at the Energy Department sprang into action, urging USEC to buy the extra six tons. USEC quickly agreed. And, not long after, negotiated a five-year contract with the Russians that locked in a price and increased the yearly amount of uranium that USEC would buy. To USEC's credit, the contract actually increases the rate at which USEC will be buying Russian uranium such that when the contract expires in 2001, USEC will have purchased one-third of the 500 tons it is supposed to eventually buy—40 percent more than the amount it would have had at this stage in the game had it stuck to the deal's original time frame. A special interagency group was also set up to more closely monitor USEC's activities.

The Day After

Despite these measures, the danger of privatizing USEC was still considerable. After all, what would happen once the five-year contract was up? And how well would the interagency group be able to monitor USEC once it was in private hands? But if you think the revelations about USEC's behavior caused the privatization advocates both in and outside of the Clinton administration to reconsider their position, think again. The Clinton administration was clearly satisfied that enough safeguards had been put in place to justify preserving USEC's role in the Russian uranium deal—and to allow the company's privatization to go forward. This past July, Assistant to the President for Economic Affairs Dan Tarullo and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger signed a joint memo recommending USEC's privatization. Soon afterwards the president gave his OK.

Citing Thomas Neff's efforts in "proposing ... the

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historic [Russian uranium] agreement," the American Physical Society chose to honor him with its 1997 Leo Szilard Award for Physics in the Public Interest. However, though he's still hopeful, Neff concedes that, as a result of USEC's privatization, his plan has proved "a lot more difficult to implement than I'd thought" when he first dreamed it up back in 1991. And the difficulties continue. Although it is now up to the Russians, rather than USEC, to find a buyer for their natural uranium, this has not proved easy. Thus for much of this year Russia's shipments to USEC were delayed—increasing the chances that the wrong people might get their hands on vast quantities of dangerous material. Meanwhile the Treasury Department is slowly moving ahead with USEC's sale either to another company or through a public stock offering. This is also causing some new national security headaches: Among the interested buyers is an alliance of companies that includes the Pleiades Group, a New York-based energy company whose chief, Alexander Shustorovich, though a naturalized Ameri-

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

George Stephanopoulos' new apartment on Riverside Drive in New York City was designed by **Stephen Miller Siegal**, draped by **Ralph Lauren**, and featured in last month's *Architectural Digest.*

Is this the Georgie we knew and loved?

Why did Sen. **John McCain** drop the free TV provision from his campaign finance reform bill? The rumor is that **Trent Lott** insisted on the change and that Lott's interest was not unrelated to his friendship with **Eddie Fritts**, his college roommate and now president of the National Association of Broadcasters, which is less than enthusiastic about giving free time to candidates. McCain says he had to drop free time in order to get his bill to the floor. The only catch is that the bill didn't make it to the floor before the Senate's adjournment.

Robert Novak in a recent column discussing **James Carville**'s charges against **David Sentelle**—remember, he's the judge who got rid of **Robert Fiske** at Sen. **Lauch Faircloth**'s request and replaced him with **Ken Starr**—said that the only "new element" to the Carville case was that Faircloth had subsequently given Sentelle's wife a job. Novak must have missed the December '96 issue of *The Washington Monthly*, in which "Who's Who" reported this "new element" a year ago.

Doug Sosnick has been saying he's leaving the White House staff for so long that he now tells friends who ask what happened that he left and came back.

Speaking of **McCain** and **Novak**, the senator was recently on the "Evans & Novak" television show and was asked if he might run for president in 2000 if he was successful with his campaign finance bill. His answer, "Would I consider the option seriously no matter what happens with campaign finance reform? Yes."

Speaking of possible third-millennium candidates, Sen. **Robert Kerrey** said on NBC that he would consider running for president in 2000. Two trips to New Hampshire within one month this fall suggest that he's not kidding.

House insiders tell us that **Dick Gephardt**'s fast-track victory over **Bill Clinton** may be a misleading indication of the minority leader's power, which they say is actually slipping. Many of his colleagues fear that he's too involved with carving out an identity for himself distinct from Clinton and **Al Gore** and too little concerned with providing wise leadership for the Democrats. One bit of good news for Gephardt is that **Vic Fazio**, the man who was considered most likely to beat him out, has decided to retire.

As you can imagine, **Bill Clinton**'s "distinguishing characteristic" was the major source of Washington humor this fall. Almost all the jokes are tasteless, but a few have been funny. One we liked is about the old Arkansas Republican who, when told of the characteristic, exclaimed, "I always knew he was crooked!"

Speaking of **Al Gore**, his close friend the lobbyist **Peter Knight** may be in some, if not hot, very warm water. He is being accused of using White House influence to secure $33 million in government contracts for his client Molten Metal. And he is suspected

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can, has strong ties to Victor Mikhailov, head of Russia's Ministry of Atomic Energy.

Even if Shustorovich fails to buy USEC, it is by now painfully clear that the U.S. government will have to keep an eagle eye trained on USEC at all times. At best this will prove a time-consuming and difficult responsibility for succeeding administrations. At worst, once the five-year deal is up, USEC will once again engage in activities that sacrifice our national security interests to its commercial ones. True, at least on paper, USEC's sale has helped to offset our deficit by $1.3 billion. But when one considers the estimated $4 trillion we spent during the Cold War to build a nuclear arsenal capable of deterring Russia from sending its nukes toward our shores, the fact that we would even contemplate endangering a plan to keep 500 tons of bomb-ready nuclear material—capable of killing over 3 billion people—out of the hands of tomorrow's Saddam Husseins and Timothy McVeighs, all in exchange for a piddling billion-plus dollars would be almost funny, were it not so frightening.

of having received $1 million from a developer in return for arranging to have his (and Gore's) good friend **Reed Hundt**, then chairman of the FCC, agree to go along with a long-term lease in the Portals building that FCC staffers hate the idea of moving to.

Did you know that **Bill Clinton**'s nominee to be secretary of the Air Force, **Daryl Jones**, is a former Amway salesman? Nothing wrong with that, but the problem is that he is alleged to have done his selling to enlisted personnel serving under him while he was an Air Force captain—a bit of a no-no under Air Force standards of conduct.

December should be named Congressional Junket Month. It is a time when the House and the Senate are rarely in session and the members are free to make those trips to Europe, the Caribbean, Hawaii, Key Biscayne, Boca Raton, New Orleans, and other locations similarly essential to the legislative process. The interesting thing about these trips is that they are rarely paid for by the congressmen. You the taxpayer either foot the bill directly or pay for it indirectly when the tab is picked up by special interests who gain influence through their largesse.

Thus, it seems only right that this be the month in which we honor the Hill's champion junketeer, House Commerce Committee Chairman **Thomas J. Bliley**. He and his staff have, according to **Ruth Marcus** of

The Washington Post, "taken upward of 100 trips this year courtesy of Philip Morris Cos., the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the National Hydropower Association, the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable Television Association, the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, and the National Oilseed Processors Association." Don't you wonder what kind of mischief those oilseed processors are up to?

You may recall that our esteemed editor predicted in the April '97 "Tilting at Windmills" that **Bill Clinton** would run for the U.S. Senate from Arkansas in 2002. Now comes **Leon Panetta**, the president's former chief of staff, with this prediction: "I'm willing to bet that within two years of retirement, he'll be running for office again. The prospect of two Republican senators from Arkansas would inspire him to get back into office."

"Every day dozens of gay men and lesbians toil diligently for law makers in the party of **Jesse Helms**, **Bob Dornan**, and the Christian Coalition," writes *The Washington Post*'s **John Yang**. One, **Brian O'Leary Bennett**, worked as an aide and later chief of staff for 12 years for Dornan—who likes to refer to gays as "sodomites." Why do the dozens do it? Yang says "virtually all those interviewed cited opposition to high taxes and a desire to curb the size and scope of the federal government."

ART BY ROMAN GENN

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Liberalism's Flagship Adrift at Sea

How The New Republic *can find its way home*

BY RICHARD BLOW

FOR THE PAST EIGHT DECADES, *The New Republic* has considered itself the foremost political journal of left-leaning intellectual thought. And, at various times during that period, a not insubstantial portion of the Washington establishment has agreed. But for the past several years, *TNR* has been falling apart. It has lost its mandate, its vision, and numerous editors. It has become smug and cynical—the embodiment of much that is wrong with political journalism today.

In the most recent chapter of *The New Republic*'s saga, this fall, editor Michael Kelly was unceremoniously canned, becoming the magazine's fourth editor in the past eight years to exit the scene. The departures are not only getting more frequent, they are getting uglier. When Michael Kinsley bid *TNR* goodbye in January of 1996 (having stayed on as a writer after vacating the editorship), the magazine wrote that "we wish him well, very well." Things had been slightly less lovey-dovey when editor Hendrik Hertzberg, Kinsley's successor, decamped in 1991; he later recalled leaving *TNR* because he was "tired of being a [liberal] frontman" for the more conservative magazine. When Andrew Sullivan departed abruptly in April 1996, things were tenser still. It's unclear whether Sullivan was fired or quit, but his subsequent disclosure that he was HIV-positive only exacerbated the drama. Literary editor Leon Wieseltier, widely considered one of the forces behind Sullivan's fall from grace, told *The Washington Post*, "I wish Andrew a long and fruitful life, but he has changed the subject. The problems around this office were not medical problems. He was responsible for an extraordinary amount of personal and political unhappiness."

For the next seven months, through the heart of the 1996 elections, *TNR* went editorless. (Wieseltier's remark gave fair warning to job candidates—a number of whom reportedly turned down the prestigious post—that the magazine's office politics were perhaps more fiercely argued than the politics in its pages.) Then in November of last year, and with huzzahs and smiles all round, Kelly was named Sullivan's replacement. *TNR*'s owner, Marty Peretz, called him "my best hire ever." And for some months all seemed well, despite grumblings about Kelly's fixation on the White House's ethical shortcomings at a time when Peretz, a former teacher and current intimate of Al Gore, seemed fixated on Gore 2000. Then, in September, the guillotine dropped, reportedly because Kelly refused to print an item making light of the scandals swirling around Gore. Regarding Kelly's farewell, *TNR* had not a kind word. A short "Notebook" item read only that "as you may have learned from the newspaper, with this issue Charles Lane succeeds Michael Kelly ... ." Lane, the Peretz-penned squib continued, "represents continuity with the deepest traditions of this journal: political independence, intellectual seriousness, good writing, and decency toward those with whom one disagrees." Outside of *TNR*'s pages, Peretz was even more direct, telling the magazine I work for, *George*, that Michael Kelly "couldn't recognize a big idea if it hit him in the face." That "decency toward those with whom one disagrees" didn't last long.

And so a new editor, Charles Lane, takes the stage, and one can only wonder how long it will be before the curtain falls on him. Will he last through 1998? It would be a surprise. Because these days, *The New Republic* spins in a cycle of irrelevance and cynicism that spits out some staffers while causing others to flee.

RICHARD BLOW *is a senior editor at* George *magazine.*

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The magazine advocates virtually nothing, but finds fault everywhere. Here's *TNR's* "Notebook" section on *U.S. News*'s "20 Ways to Save the World" issue: "These are not solutions to problems; these are problems shallowly considered by people who mistake earnestness for seriousness . . . ."; on a *Time* magazine anecdote in which former GOP speechwriter Peggy Noonan offers to keep an eye on one young mother's baby during a Dole rally: "The pampered columnist as babysitting everywoman: let's hear it for civic journalism!"; on journalist Sydney Blumenthal's joining the Clinton administration: "With any luck . . . he'll get his back pay." The magazine's features have proven no less vitriolic, a prime example being Hanna Rosin's May 19 piece on this spring's volunteerism conference. Focusing resolutely on the pointlessness and phoniness of the gathering, Rosin reduced it all to a self-indulgent gab fest—thus the piece's title, "Blah-blah." Blah-blah indeed.

But in attacking everything, the magazine has grown confused. What does it stand for? Not truly conservative, certainly not liberal, *The New Republic* has become increasingly marginal in its own city. One struggles to think of the recent *New Republic* article that is widely discussed or debated—in other words, influential. And the examples that come to mind do so for less than sterling reasons: Because they're influential but wrong (Betsy McCaughey Ross's attack on the Clinton health care plan); or wrong and not influential (the excerpt from Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*).

TNR, frankly, has grown toxic. As it skitters from one end of the ideological spectrum to another, it fails to radiate the sense of a magazine with a purpose, that wonderful feeling the best magazines provide when you open their covers, of having entered a community with common interests and goals. Too often these days, reading *The New Republic* leaves one with a bad taste in the mouth.

Which is both an awkward and a sad thing for me to say. Sad, because as a young man I worked at *TNR* as a reporter-researcher (the lowest rung on its editorial ladder, yet still a wonderful experience) and have since occasionally written for the magazine. Awkward, because *TNR* has been a frequent and vituperous critic of my current employer. But being on *TNR*'s enemies list doesn't particularly sting—it is a long list—and this article is not intended as retribution.

The truth is that I have always liked and admired Marty Peretz, and I care deeply about the magazine's well-being. Its current condition is so distressing because, personal matters aside, *The New Republic* has a long history of principled championship of liberalism, and one hates to witness its decline. It is too important a magazine not to feel passionate about. Watching it turn sour is painful—like watching a novelist whose gift has dried up grow frustrated and bitter, reduced to merely railing against the words of other, more productive figures.

Sailing Too Close to the Wind

"Once upon a time," Andrew Sullivan wrote wistfully not so long ago, "magazines were writers' collectives held together by a common ethos or philosophy." *The New Republic*'s problems stem largely from the fact that it is as far away from that state of being as an institution can get: It lacks a common ethos, and it is steeped in a philosophy of opposition—an anti-philosophy that is ultimately more damaging to its practitioner than to its targets.

This deterioration didn't happen overnight. Its seeds were planted in the mid-1980s, some years after Marty Peretz had bought the magazine and Michael Kinsley had become its editor. Peretz was a 1960s liberal who'd become disillusioned with the policies and the ethos of that era and moved rightward. On questions ranging from race to Israel to American intervention in Central America, he toughened up his magazine. Michael Kinsley was a brilliant Harvard graduate with a mind that could see around corners, and he pushed the magazine in a different way. Kinsley had a great talent for untangling the knots of people and policy in Washington, and an eagle's eye for hypocrisy. Then something of an outsider in the capital, the nerdy, endearingly awkward Kinsley made the deftly executed hatchet job the magazine's hallmark.

At the time, the combination of ideological flexibility and merciless butchery of Washington's sacred cows worked. Who could forget Kinsley's evisceration of Washington hack Bob Strauss, or staff writer Henry Fairlie's deflation of self-promoter Pamela Harriman? *The New Republic* was unpredictable, lively, and contentious in the best sense of the word; that is to say, it kicked up a fuss because it believed in something. In a time of Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, and Michael Dukakis, *The New Republic* was insistent about examining and changing what the Democratic Party stood for. And rightly so.

At least in the short run, this mode of existence brought the magazine oodles of gushing publicity. After all, *TNR* was winning some important battles: against the poisonous nature of identity politics, the long-term corrosive effects of affirmative action, the temptations of the Central American left. The magazine *was* changing the Democratic party, and if the debate was heated, that was because it mattered—

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and as a result, so did the magazine.

But in retrospect, the dangers of this modus literati seem more evident. Peretz and other *TNR* editors used to boast that readers never knew where on the ideological spectrum the magazine's writers would come from next. Yet while no magazine strives to be predictable, an opinion magazine needs to have a focus, a direction. An opinion magazine can spend some time rethinking its convictions, but it had better decide on them sooner or later, because if it doesn't, what at first seems a bountiful intellectual debate can degenerate into fruitless bickering. Indeed, in the years after Kinsley's departure, *TNR* lost its direction, couldn't decide whether it supported Bill Clinton or not. And if it didn't, was there any Democrat (other than Gore) whom it did like? In this context, contrast *TNR* with *The Weekly Standard*, the two-plus-year-old conservative weekly. The *Standard* still feels young, and it is sometimes immature. But as it tries to hash out the meaning and consequences and direction of the Republican takeover of Congress, the reader at least gets the feeling that the publication is contributing; that it cares about something.

Having lost its mandate, its vision, and numerous editors, *TNR* has become the embodiment of much that is wrong with journalism today.

But caring about something can leave one vulnerable—it is easier to attack than propose—and because *The New Republic* has attacked so many, it cannot afford to leave itself vulnerable. Or such is the feeling one gets from reading its pages.

Like Rats From a Sinking Ship

The slide accelerated under the editorship of Andrew Sullivan. Anointed in 1991, the 28-year-old English expatriate was a controversial choice. The description of Sullivan—young-gay-Catholic-conservative—grew old fast. In truth, Sullivan was conservative, but not "a conservative," as in, not part of the modern conservative movement, a distinction that many failed to make. Still, his reputation for conservatism struck some *TNR*-watchers as ominous. It was tolerable to have conservative writers, such as Fred Barnes, who covered the White House. But to have an editor who was conservative?

There are three standard criticisms of Sullivan's tenure, and at least two of them strike me as seriously off-base. The first charge is that he was a poor manager of people—as might be expected of anyone in their late-twenties taking such a job—and by all reports this is the true one. Sullivan is at his best an introspective and at worst a narcissistic person, and he apparently didn't worry much about the care and feeding of a high-maintenance staff. It is probably no coincidence that *TNR* began to suffer from a serious brain drain during his time there: Such impressive writers as Robert Wright, Jacob Weisberg, Mickey Kaus, and, yes, Michael Kinsley said goodbye to the *TNR* offices during the Sullivan regime. It's unfair to lay that entirely at Sullivan's feet—people move on—but he does appear to bear some of the responsibility. And this is a significant failing: If there is no esprit de corps among the employees of a magazine, there can be no consensus within its pages.

It was also said—at least by people in Washington—that Sullivan paid too much attention to popular culture and not enough to "politics." Critics lambasted articles by Camille Paglia on Hillary Clinton and Douglas Copeland on O.J. Simpson's Los Angeles and Bruce Feiler on the politics of country music. Sullivan, the argument went, didn't pay enough attention to politics, which in this case seemed to mean that *TNR* wasn't covering enough congressional campaigns or think-tank tomes for its Washington readers. But Sullivan was right to argue that in order to stay relevant *TNR* had to focus on the politics of culture as well as the culture of politics. He was just a little ahead of his time.

Finally, the magazine under Sullivan was criticized as "too gay." Yes, Sullivan did bring gay issues into *TNR*—gay marriage, gays in the military, AIDS. But in fact, the number of articles relating to homosexuality was a tiny percentage of *TNR*'s content. (The charges that there was too much material about gays said more about the people making them than about the magazine.) In truth, the articles about homosexuality showed that *The New Republic* had a human side; that it wasn't afraid to say something constructive, or even comforting; that it did more than sit in judgement of everybody else. The real reason those articles stood out was because they contained a sense of mission in a magazine otherwise devoid of it. And this was one of the less-noticed problems of Sullivan's tenure: that for all of his labels—or perhaps because of them—he failed to move the magazine in a politically coherent direction.

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During Sullivan's term, both he and Peretz described the magazine as "non-ideological," which they meant as a good thing—no monolithic New Deal liberalism here. But if *TNR* lacked a set of beliefs to inspire it and give it meaning and create a community of readers; and if its critics inside and out weren't prepared to broaden its focus to cultural as well as political analysis—then what was left for it? And so the magazine has become something of a journalistic farm team, at which young writers can practice their swings before moving up to the big leagues.

On one level this was a smart move for *TNR*, for it helped the magazine deal with an unpleasant—and growing—truth about the economics of political journalism. The days when the best and the brightest automatically migrated to *The New Republic* because it gave them freedom and paid about as well as anywhere else in print journalism are gone. Now, many of the best political journalists in the country are signed up by glossy magazines such as *George*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *GQ*—all of which pay a living wage rather than the 15 to 20 cents a word *TNR* pays freelancers. *TNR*'s staff writers have come to rely on money they make freelancing. Rather like waiters who earn subminimum wage but survive on tips, they have turned the magazine into a platform for their more lucrative, high-profile work. *TNR* gives them experience and credibility; they give it what time they can.

For *TNR*, this reality isn't all bad. By hiring young talent and giving them a chance to show their stuff, *The New Republic* doesn't have to rely on the dribs and drabs offered it by high-price-tag, established writers, and can cultivate a reputation as a breeding ground for future stars. Moreover, most of its young writers retain a sense of loyalty to the magazine when they go on to bigger and better-paying gigs.

In some ways, however, this training-ground approach has highlighted the cynicism-over-substance culture of *TNR*. Young staffers quickly learn that the best way to advance up the masthead is to find some apparently easy target—some perceived practitioner of hypocrisy or sleaze—and meticulously wrap a web of venomous words around it. Perhaps the best known of the young talents who have slashed their way to success at *TNR* is Ruth Shalit. A conservative whose journalism attacks both left and right, Shalit was, a few years back, the master of the *TNR* hatchet job—a fluttery-eyed, breathy young woman who'd get people to say the darndest things and then make them look asinine for it. Yet Shalit's reporting techniques proved as controversial as her articles. If one followed the magazine's letters column, about two weeks after every Shalit story would come an outraged missive from the person involved, invariably claiming that he or she had never actually said those things. People certainly resort to such denials after they've been quoted saying something they shouldn't have, but in Shalit's case, there seemed to be a pattern. Soon enough came accusations of plagiarism against Shalit—one, two, three—which *TNR* never really seemed to care about or honestly confront. A "Notebook" item hemming and hawing about one plagiarism instance was headlined "Oops." Such a casual attitude toward journalistic ethics didn't help Shalit, and it didn't help the integrity of a magazine that was busily firing away at every target in sight. An enormously gifted and intelligent writer, Shalit appears to have curtailed a bad habit. But for a time, she embodied the culture of cynicism draining the spirit out of *TNR*.

On a larger scale, *TNR*'s cult of the hatchet job ultimately poisons itself. After all, a hit piece is only truly effective when two prerequisites are met: One, when it is the minority article, when it surprises because it stands in contrast to the more prevailing, constructive, or explanatory story. At *The New Republic*, the hatchet job has become the paradigm, and as a result feels formulaic and predictable—and, thus, discountable. And two, such articles are like surgery: Clumsily done, they can certainly damage the subject, but they also do harm to the practitioner. Kinsley knew how to perform an elegant surgery, but the doctors who followed him were not all so gifted.

Cap'n Kelly

Into this pool jumped Michael Kelly, the ostensible antidote to Andrew Sullivan. He wasn't gay, for one thing. That experiment was over. He was a reporter who covered politics, which would mean the perceived lack of political coverage in the magazine would be addressed. And coming from *The New Yorker*, he was expected to bring some of the cachet of Tina Brown's high-priced journalism to a magazine that really couldn't afford it. Moreover, Kelly understood the value of encouraging the young talent on staff.

In another way, however, hiring Kelly was a drastic mistake. He was acerbic in the extreme, and unlikely to rein in the magazine's growing nihilism and cynicism. If anything, junior staffers looking to Kelly for editorial direction would see nasty and snide as the way to go. What's more, upon his hiring, Kelly admitted that he had no particular interest in ideology. A gifted reporter himself, he wanted the magazine to emphasize reporting—though he should have known from his experience at *GQ* and *The New Yorker* that *The New Republic* cannot survive simply as an organ for report-

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ing. Too many other places can afford to do it better. A magazine in search of a point of view had hired an editor who explicitly disavowed the need for one.

The irony is that, through his writing of the magazine's "TRB" column and the editorials, Kelly did try to chart a return to liberalism. But his liberalism was, in the most literal sense of the word, repellent. It was defined by a visceral dislike of any lingering hint of the 1960s. It was personal in nature, often singling out not the left's ideas but its types. It was written with an anger and rawness that seemed more intent on intimidating than on convincing. If Michael Kelly's liberalism could have taken human form, it would have been an Irish cop from the 1950s, swinging his nightstick and looking out for any fairies or long-hairs who might like to mix it up a little. As Kelly said to *Rolling Stone*, liberals spend too much time "worrying whether [schools] should be teaching *Heather Has Two Mommies*."

First and most insistent was his obsession with President Clinton's ethical wrongdoings and personal shortcomings, themes Kelly returned to again and again and again, as if the failure of each new column to make Clinton confess his sins drove Kelly to distraction. "It is time to speak well of Bill Clinton," Kelly announced in a column in December of last year. "He is of course a shocking liar. He will say absolutely anything at all. ... He is breathtakingly cynical. ... He is an opportunist of such proportions that the only thing that exceeds his reach is his grasp. ... He is the fairest of fair-weather friends ... ." Is this *The New Republic* speaking? Or Rush Limbaugh?

With writing like this, Kelly made the debate about *TNR*'s ideological moorings completely irrelevant. He had, in tone and technique, morphed *The New Republic* into a conservative attack-dog. The problem was not that Kelly was always wrong. It was the inability to discuss Clinton in any other context beside the ad hominem—as if the repeated litany of insults constituted meaningful argument. Kelly, the man who talked of the need for reporting, seemed to revel in the simple fact that, in an opinion magazine, he could say whatever he wanted. And so Kelly went on to describe Clinton as "hummingbird-in-chief"; "pedestrian as a postman"; and "not really a very righteous man," a man who had about him "an obvious air of the rogue, the seducer, the sly-dog, the self-consciously bad boy." Did Kelly want to spank him?

Then there was the exaggeration. "The Clinton effort at manipulating and discouraging hostile press attention is not unprecedented in scope," Kelly wrote. "The precedent is the Nixon operation." Equating the Clinton White House and the Nixon White House is not only silly and wrong, it is dangerous; it is either historical ignorance or historical revisionism. In a column about the excesses of the left, Kelly wrote that liberalism's "animating impulse is to marginalize itself and then to enjoy its own company. And to make itself as unattractive to as many as possible: If it were a person, it would pierce its tongue." This is not an argument. It is a pronouncement of an ungenerous mind.

The truth was, Kelly just didn't seem very comfortable with liberals. They were too touchy-feely, too ... squishy. After a vacation, he wrote, "You cannot swat a black fly in Vermont without disturbing the vacant-eyed rest of a pallid, hairy, and purposefully ugly white person." (Kind of wish you could, well, just slap 'em around a little, don't you, Michael?) Ah, but the real danger was not that these ugly white people were sleeping, but that they were busily taking over—and we normal people were too blind to see it! It was up to Kelly to raise the alarm. "When the subject of the left is raised these days, the general liberal response is to assert that the left scarcely exists, consisting only of a fringe element, isolated and ignored, in a few editorial boards and humanities departments. This is wrong. The left is not nowhere; it is, in a bland and vague way, everywhere. As the aging sandalistas have accrued power and raised children ... ." They are pervasive. They are breeding. They wear sandals. Run.

Kelly's definition of liberalism, clearly, excluded "the left." And by the left, he seemed to mean the return of Jack Reed. As Kelly later argued, what he really feared was "schemes of social engineering" achieved "through a brutal system of mandated behaviorism," also known as the "Nurse Ratched state." A creative and brutal system of mandated behaviorism? Was Kelly trying to tell us that the Cold War isn't over—it's just moved to Burlington? An example of that "brutal system"? Well, there's the "fanatical" FDA commissioner, David Kessler, who has the audacity to insist that tobacco is a drug and should be defined as such by the government. Kelly, however, argued that smoking a cigarette on the 4th of July is "my patriotic duty [and] yours, too, if you care about living in a nation predicated on the idea that the citizen must be protected from the natural tendency of the state to expand into his or her own life." Just make sure it's not a joint, or a pint of Ben & Jerry's, or Kelly might bust you.

Michael Kelly, in short, brought *The New Republic* full circle. In a place that, a decade ago, struggled with the best qualities of liberalism—its respect for multiple voices, its optimistic view of human nature, its commitment to freedom of thought and speech and, yes, decency towards those with whom it dis-

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agrees—he reproduced some of the ugliest qualities of modern conservatism: its taste for the sneer, its substitution of insult for argument, its caricature of the culturally different, its willingness to turn fear and hate into mockery and diatribe.

All Hands on Deck

So where does *The New Republic* go from here? Despite all the unpleasantness, Kelly's stint could prove instructive in a couple of ways. One, Peretz would be wise to continue Kelly's policy of looking to journalism's rising stars for the magazine's reporting base. Regardless of who's in the editor's seat, *The New Republic* cannot afford high-priced, celebrity journalism. And with the alienated Kelly exiled, now is as promising a time as any to begin dismantling the magazine's cult of the hatchet job.

Two, on the whole Kelly was misguided in his vicious rhetorical crusade against the Clinton/Gore administration. Peretz is entitled to stake out a position for his opinion magazine to take on Al Gore, just as long as *TNR* is up-front about its stance. What Peretz needs to accept, however, is that, in order for his publication to command the respect of its readership, it must bend over backwards to address any real misdeeds or foibles of Gore's that may come to light. Otherwise, *The New Republic* will find itself without a shred of credibility on the most important political figure in the next three or seven or perhaps 11 years.

But if Peretz finds it too painful to face his friend's shortcomings, which would certainly be understandable, then maybe it's time for him to consider something radical: putting the magazine on the auction block. Without question, Peretz has been a courageous owner. For all his whims, for all his blind spots, he has been willing to subsidize a vital but money-losing venture, and he has created a haven for some of the most significant writers in American life. *The New Republic* may have slid back into the second-tier of magazines; but without Peretz, it would not have recently risen into the first. Still, all good things .... Peretz has made noises lately that he is starting to weary of the magazine's financial woes. He has also decreased his involvement, and started a new, theoretically money-making venture, The Street.com, an online service for investors.

So why not put the magazine up for sale while it's still a hot commodity? Granted, you never know what the new owner might do. He or she might fire the entire staff. But if the folks at *TNR* are opposed to anything, it's entitlement programs and affirmative action. They could handle it. And, in the hands of a new caretaker, one of the century's most important liberal voices might just survive.

The Washington Monthly
Journalism Award

OCTOBER 1997

SPECIAL REPORT
"What Makes a Good School"
Time

This is an example of the kind of commitment the news magazines should regularly bring to the coverage of important institutions. We especially want to recognize Erik Larson's brilliant article, "Where Does the Money Go: How in one American city, Baltimore, a big school system managed to spend millions of dollars on bureaucracy and dubious special programs—but all too little on the kids."

CHRISTOPHER SHEA
In Drug-Policy Debates, a Center at Columbia U. Takes a Hard Line
The Chronicle of Higher Education

Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse is placed under hot yellow lights when Shea uncovers the not-too-savvy side of this media-savvy organization. The center—known for bringing cigarette, drug, and alcohol abuse concerns to the forefront of America's attention—is criticized by respected researchers for causing unnecessary alarm among Americans. The center's prime issues, such as women's binge drinking and drinking on college campuses, have been undermined by the center's use of inaccurate statistics. Shea also explores how Joseph A. Califano, the often laudably enthusiastic head of the center, may sometimes unwittingly do more harm than good with his aggressive media tactics.

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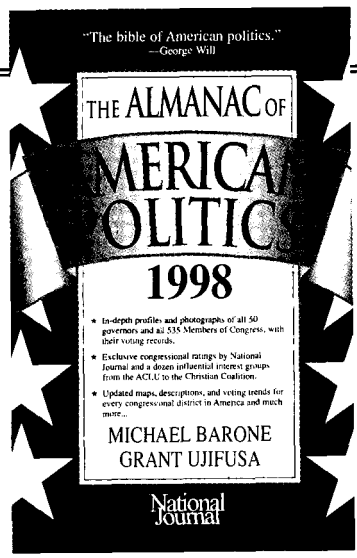

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National Journal

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The Peacemaker

How Jimmy Carter helped save us from war with North Korea

By Don Oberdorfer

For Robert Gallucci, assistant secretary of state for politico-military affairs, the spring of 1994 had an eerie and disturbing resemblance to historian Barbara Tuchman's account of "the guns of August," when, in the summer of 1914, World War I began in cross-purposes, misunderstanding, and inadvertence. As he and other policy makers moved inexorably toward a confrontation with North Korea, Gallucci was conscious that "this had an escalatory quality, that could deteriorate not only into a war but into a big war." Secretary of Defense William Perry, looking back on the events, concluded that the course he was on "had a real risk of war associated with it." Commanders in the field were even more convinced. Lieutenant General Howell Estes, the senior U.S. Air Force officer in Korea, recalled later that although neither he nor other commanders said so out loud, not even in private conversations with one another, "inside we all thought we were going to war."

The Defueling Crisis

The issue that precipitated this showdown was the unloading of the irradiated fuel rods from the 5-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon, North Korea's only indigenous reactor in operation. Such rods, each a yard long and about two inches wide, could be chemically treated in the plant in the final stages of construction at Yongbyon to separate plutonium for atomic weapons from the rest of the highly radioactive material.

Unloading the reactor in 1994 was of great importance for two reasons, one having to do with the past and the other with the future. Regarding the past, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) experts believed that systematic sampling and careful segregation of rods from particular parts of the reactor's core under its supervision would disclose how long the fuel had been burned and at what intensity. Satellite surveillance had indicated that in 1989 the reactor had been shut down for 110 days, during which time about half of its fuel rods could have been replaced and made available for fabrication of plutonium. By monitoring the reactor's unloading, the IAEA could thus compile a verifiable record of its operating history, confirming how many fuel rods had been previously removed, and therefore identifying the outer limit of the plutonium that might have been produced.

Such a disclosure would be a major step toward eliminating the ambiguity about the DPRK's (North Korea's) past acquisition of nuclear weapons material. From Pyongyang's viewpoint, however, this was a no-win proposition: If it was established that Pyongyang had not diverted nuclear fuel clandestinely to manufacture plutonium in the past, its nuclear threat would diminish and with it the country's bargaining power; but if the supervised unloading established that Pyongyang had lied and produced more plutonium than it had admitted, it would lose face and the hunt would be on for the missing nuclear material.

The future of the 8,000 fuel rods that would now be unloaded from the reactor was of even greater importance. Secretary of Defense Perry estimated that this entire load of rods could be converted into enough plutonium for four or five nuclear weapons. While the United States was not prepared to go to war to clarify the past, it was determined to do so, if necessary, to prevent North Korea from converting these and future irradiated fuel rods into plutonium for nuclear weapons.

On April 19, Pyongyang notified the IAEA of its intention to defuel the reactor "at an early date," and

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it invited agency inspectors to witness the unloading operations—but without specifying what procedures would be followed or what the inspectors would be able to see and do. There followed weeks of sparring over the procedures, with Pyongyang offering to permit inspectors to observe and take some measurements but not to segregate or sample the fuel rods in a way that would make it possible to determine their past history. The IAEA refused to send any inspectors unless its procedures for sampling fuel rods were fully accepted. Washington backed the IAEA, though some officials believed the agency was being too rigid.

Removal of the spent fuel rods began on May 8 without international observation or approval. On June 2, when more than 60 percent of the fuel rods had been removed, IAEA Director General Hans Blix sent a strong letter to the UN Security Council that was an implicit call for international action. Blix's letter was the opening gun in the long-discussed drive for UN sanctions against the recalcitrant, often-maddening DPRK.

North Korea issued a formal statement on June 5 announcing that "sanctions mean war, and there is no mercy in war." Undeterred, Washington proceeded with diplomatic consultations aimed at a sanctions vote in the Security Council and, in parallel, with plans for a stepped-up U.S. military presence in and around Korea, preparing for the possibility of war.

The Deepening Conflict

The devastating possibilities of the deepening conflict were alarming to many of those most familiar with North Korea. Even administration officials conceded that sanctions were unlikely to force Pyongyang to reverse course: The isolated country was relatively invulnerable to outside pressures, since it had so little international commerce and few important international connections of any sort. Moreover, its fierce pride and often-repeated threats suggested that it might actually fight rather than capitulate.

In early June, as Clinton opted for sanctions, former President Jimmy Carter reentered the Korea saga to play a historic role. Carter had received invitations from Kim Il Sung in 1991, 1992, and 1993 to visit Pyongyang, but each time he had been asked by the State Department not to go, on grounds that his trip would complicate the Korean problem rather than help to resolve it.

As the sanctions drive got under way, Carter expressed his growing anxiety in a telephone call to Clinton. Briefed on June 5 by Gallucci, who was sent to Plains, Ga., for that purpose, Carter learned to his dismay that there was no American plan for direct contact with Kim Il Sung. He immediately dispatched a letter to Clinton telling him that he had decided to go to Pyongyang in view of the dangers at hand. Clinton, on the advice of Vice President Gore, interposed no objection to the trip as long as Carter clearly stated that he was acting as a private citizen rather than as an official U.S. envoy.

Even as these developments were taking place, North Korea was also beginning to sketch out areas of conciliation and compromise. On June 3, Pyongyang broadcast an unusual statement in the name of its chief negotiator. Kang Sok Ju announced that North Korea was prepared to dismantle its reprocessing plant ("radio-chemical laboratory") for manufacturing plutonium in connection with the replacement of its existing facilities by a light-water reactor project. This went one step beyond a written statement by Kim Il Sung to *The Washington Times* on his April 15 birthday, when he said the reprocessing plant "may not be needed" if the light-water reactors were supplied. In the swiftly moving tide toward collision, neither statement received much international attention.

In the meantime Carter, accompanied by his wife Rosalynn and a small party of aides and security guards, had crossed the DMZ on June 15 on his way to see Kim Il Sung. Carter found walking across the dividing line at Panmunjom, then being handed over by U.S. and South Korean military to North Korean military "a bizarre and disturbing experience, evidence of an incredible lack of communication and understanding." He was well aware of the risk to his reputation, believing that "the chances of success were probably minimal because so much momentum had built up on both sides of the sanctions issue."

In his initial meeting in Pyongyang, Carter found Foreign Minister Kim Yong Nam so uncompromising and negative that the former president awoke at 3 a.m. believing it likely that North Korea would go to war rather than yield to international sanctions.

The next morning, Carter met with Kim Il Sung. For Kim, the meeting with the most prominent American ever to visit the DPRK was the culminating moment of his two-decades-long effort to make direct contact with American ruling circles. The Great Leader greeted his visitor with a booming welcome, a hearty handshake, and big smile, which was returned by Carter's characteristic toothy grin.

When the talks began, Carter explained that he had come as a private citizen rather than as a representative of the U.S. government, but that he had come with the knowledge and support of his government. The presence of Dick Christenson, the Korean-speaking deputy director of the State Department's

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Korea desk, was testimony to the semiofficial nature of the mission. Carter emphasized that the differences in the two governmental systems should not be an obstacle to friendship between the two nations, a point he repeated several times. If the current nuclear issues could be resolved, he said, then high-level negotiations on normalizing relations could move ahead.

Kim, responding on the high plane of generality and mutual recognition that is particularly important in Asia, said that the essential problem between the two nations was lack of trust and that therefore "creating trust is the main task." Kim expressed frustration that, although he had often announced that the DPRK couldn't make and didn't need nuclear weapons, he was not believed. The DPRK's requirement was for nuclear energy, he declared: If the United States helped to supply light-water reactors, North Korea would dismantle its gas-graphite reactors and return to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

As part of a solution to the nuclear issue, Kim also requested U.S. guarantees against nuclear attacks on the DPRK. He expressed irritation that South Korea might interfere with whatever solution could be worked out, saying that whenever the prospect of making progress between Pyongyang and Washington came close, Seoul found a way to block it.

Before Shalikashvili had finished his briefing, a White House aide entered the room with the news that Carter was on the telephone from Pyongyang.

Carter, following talking points that he had cleared with Gallucci by telephone before traveling to Pyongyang, asked two things of Kim: that he temporarily freeze his nuclear program until the completion of the planned third round of U.S.-DPRK nuclear negotiations, and that the two remaining IAEA inspectors still at Yongbyon, who were scheduled to be expelled from the country on the next flight to Beijing, be permitted to remain. Even though the expulsions might seem a matter of course since North Korea had announced its withdrawal from IAEA, they were certain to be taken as a sign that Pyongyang was going full speed ahead with a nuclear weapons program.

Apparently completely unfamiliar with the issue of the inspectors' expulsion, Kim turned to Deputy Foreign Minister and chief DPRK negotiator Kang Sok Ju, who was among the few aides present, and asked what this request was about. Kang jumped to his feet and stood at attention, as all aides did when addressing the Great Leader. Then, Kang patiently explained the issue. Kim seemed wary of giving something important away, but he asked his aide's opinion. Kang responded that keeping the inspectors on duty would be the right thing to do. Following this discussion, all in Korean, Kim turned to Carter and announced that North Korea would reverse the previous order and leave the inspectors in place.

When Kim Il Sung agreed to the temporary freeze and to keep the inspectors and monitoring equipment in place, a relieved Carter told Kim he would recommend that the U.S. government "support" North Korea's acquisition of light-water reactors (although he made it clear the United States could not finance or supply them directly) and that U.S.-DPRK negotiations be quickly reconvened. (Carter said he could speak with assurance that no American nuclear weapons were in South Korea or tactical nuclear weapons in the waters surrounding the peninsula. He and Kim agreed that the Korean peninsula should continue to be free of nuclear weapons from any source.)

It was the morning of June 16 in Washington, a half-day behind Korea. President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Secretary of State Christopher, Secretary of Defense Perry, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Shalikashvili, CIA Director James Woolsey, UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and other senior foreign policy and defense officials were gathered in the Cabinet Room in the second hour of a climactic decision-making meeting about the Korean nuclear issue. At the outset, Clinton gave final approval to proceed with the drive for the sanctions against North Korea in the UN Security Council, where the American sanctions plan had been circulating in draft form for several days. That decided, General Shalikashvili began outlining the U.S. military buildup in and around Korea, which Perry and the Joint Chiefs had recommended in tandem with the sanctions decision. The problem was nobody knew how North Korea would react to such extensive reinforce-

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ments at a time of high tension on the peninsula. "I always got this feeling that the North Koreans studied the desert [Operation Desert Storm against Iraq] more than we did almost," said a general with access to all the available intelligence. "And they learned one thing: You don't let the United States build up its forces and then let them go to war against you. ... So I always felt that the North Koreans were never going to let us do a large buildup. They would see their window of opportunity closing, and they would come." Adding to this officer's apprehension was a chilling fact not well known outside the U.S. command: At Panmunjom in May, a North Korean colonel told a U.S. officer, "We're not going to let you do a buildup." He did not say, nor did anyone know, how much of a buildup of American forces might trigger a North Korean preemptive strike.

Before Shalikashvili had finished his briefing, however, a White House aide entered the room with the news that Carter was on the telephone line from Pyongyang. Gallucci, who was designated to take the call in an adjoining room, heard the enthusiastic former president say that Kim Il Sung had agreed to freeze the nuclear program and to allow the IAEA inspectors to remain. Carter said he believed the third round of U.S.-DPRK negotiations should be convened in the light of this breakthrough, and he was asking for White House permission to say so. Then he told Gallucci, who was startled but made no comment, that he planned to describe the progress he had made in a live interview shortly with CNN, which had been permitted to bring its cameras to Pyongyang to cover the Carter mission. Gallucci told Carter he would report his news to a meeting on these issues taking place as they spoke, and he promised a response later.

Gallucci's report was a bombshell in the Cabinet Room. Except for leaving the inspectors in place, the substance of Carter's accomplishments sounded to some like nothing new. But there was anger in the room about Carter's imminent CNN interview, which seemed likely to upstage and embarrass the administration just as it was reaching major new decisions on a problem it had been living with for more than a year. One participant viewed Carter's actions as "near traitorous." Another feared it was a stalling action by the North Koreans, just as the United States was about to "pull the trigger" on sanctions and the troop buildup. Whatever their private thoughts, Clinton and Gore decreed that it was essential to shape a substantive response, not indulge in mere Carter-bashing.

As Clinton left for another event, the others crowded in front of a television set where they stood or sat, some on the floor, as Carter spoke by satellite from halfway around the world in Pyongyang to CNN White House correspondent Wolf Blitzer, who was on the White House lawn a few steps away, and CNN diplomatic correspondent Ralph Begleiter, who was in a Washington studio a few blocks away. Carter repeated Kim Il Sung's statements and declared them to be "a very important and very positive step toward the alleviation of this crisis." While saying that next steps would be up to the Clinton administration, Carter publicly proclaimed his preference: "What is needed now is a very simple decision just to let the already constituted delegations from North Korea and the United States have their third meeting, which has been postponed. That's all that's needed now, and that's all the North Koreans are addressing."

Suddenly a diplomatic-military crisis took on new political dimensions, as it was played out in public on live television in full view of Clinton's friends and foes at home as well as officials around the world. To the consternation of the White House team, the press saw administration officials as bystanders while a private citizen, former president Carter, appeared in control of U.S. policy.

After the officials filed back into the Cabinet Room, National Security Council aide Stanley Roth, a veteran of Asia policy-making on Capitol Hill and at the Pentagon, suggested the course of action that was ultimately accepted: that the administration design its own detailed requirements for a freeze on the North Korean nuclear program and send them back to Pyongyang through Carter. In effect, the United States would say, "We agree and accept if you accept our version of the freeze." As was noted in the meeting, the tactic was similar to a celebrated U.S. ploy at the height of the 1962 U.S.-Soviet Cuban missile crisis, when the Kennedy administration had interpreted communications from Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in its own way to fashion an acceptable settlement.

Gallucci and two other aides left the room and drafted U.S. requirements for a North Korean freeze that was to be in effect while talks continued. In their version, North Korea would have to agree specifically not to place new fuel rods in the 5-megawatt reactor and not to reprocess the irradiated fuel rods that had been removed. By the time it ended, the marathon White House meeting had stretched on for more than five hours.

Lake then spoke to Carter in Pyongyang, where it was approaching dawn on June 17, and outlined the conditions, which went beyond what North Korea had offered and well beyond the legal restraints of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Carter objected vocif-

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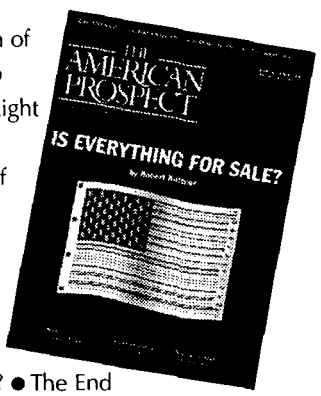

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erously to upping the ante, noting that these new conditions had not been mentioned before his trip and that he had not presented them to Kim Il Sung or others in Pyongyang. It seemed far from certain, perhaps even unlikely, that the North Koreans would accept them. In fact, however, perhaps because of their own urgent desire to end the dangerous confrontation, the North Koreans quickly accepted.

To celebrate the easing of the crisis, Kim Il Sung invited Carter and his party to a celebration on the Taedong River aboard the presidential yacht. During the boat ride, the exhausted Carter mistakenly told Kim while CNN cameras were rolling that the American drive for economic and political sanctions at the UN Security Council had been halted due to their discussions the previous day. This action had not yet been taken. Carter's comment, which was played on American television, seemed to suggest once more that the White House had lost control of its Korea policies. This gaffe turned out to be the most controversial facet of Carter's trip in the U.S. press and dominated much of the immediate commentary.

The boat ride was also the occasion for the most important breakthrough of the mission from the South Korean standpoint. Sitting across a small table in the main cabin of the yacht, Carter brought up the unresolved state of North-South relations and the possibility of a North-South summit meeting, which South Korean President Kim Young Sam had asked him to propose to his North Korean counterpart. Kim Il Sung recounted for Carter his version of the various attempts at agreement between the two halves of the divided country, and he expressed his frustration that little had been accomplished. In a remarkable statement coming from him, Kim said that the fault for the lack of progress lay on both sides, and that responsibility for the mistakes had to be shared. Kim said he had noted his southern counterpart's statements, in his inaugural address the previous year, about the primacy of national kinship and his offer of a summit meeting "at any time and in any place." He went on to say that he was ready to meet Kim Young Sam and that their meeting should be held without preconditions or extended preliminary talks. He invited Carter to pass along this message to the South Korean president.

How and why Kim Il Sung decided to proceed to a summit with the South Korean president in the last days of his life is a matter of great speculation. Shortly after Carter left North Korea through Panmunjom, he called on Kim Young Sam at the Blue House. The South Korean president was initially cool to Carter and his mission, believing that once again the fate of the peninsula had been under negotiation at a very high level without his participation. When Carter conveyed Kim Il Sung's summit offer, however, the South Korean president became visibly excited. Within the hour, Kim Young Sam announced his acceptance of an early and unconditional summit meeting, thereby turning Carter's mission into a personal initiative to achieve what his predecessors had tried and failed to do. In a sudden and entirely unexpected reversal of fortune, the immense tension and great danger in the Korean peninsula gave way to the greatest hope in years for a rapprochement between the leaders of the North and South.

Carter called it "a miracle" that his meetings with Kim Il Sung had transformed a confrontation at the brink of war into new and promising sets of U.S.-DPRK and North-South negotiations. "I personally believe the crisis is over," he announced after briefing officials at the White House, and within a few days it was clear that this was so. The sanctions activity and plans for extensive reinforcement of U.S. troops were dropped. After obtaining written confirmation from Pyongyang of its acceptance of the U.S.-devised freeze on its nuclear program, Washington announced readiness to proceed to the third round of U.S.-DPRK negotiations, which were scheduled to begin on July 8 in Geneva.

Despite the positive results of his unorthodox initiative, Carter initially was the object of more criticism than praise. American politicians, public figures, and the press, emphasizing the contradictions between Carter's efforts and Clinton administration policies, were critical of his intervention. The former president was startled to be privately informed, as he came back across the DMZ, that the White House did not want him to return home through Washington or to even make a telephone report to Clinton. Later the administration relented, and Carter paid a visit to the White House en route to Atlanta, although Clinton remained at Camp David during the meeting with his Democratic predecessor and spoke to him only by telephone.

It will be years, perhaps many years, before it will be possible to know with certainty how close the Korean peninsula came to a devastating new outbreak of war in the spring of 1994. It is instructive that those in the U.S. and South Korean governments who were closest to the decisions are among those who, in retrospect, rate the chances for hostilities to have been the highest. It is clear, however, that the United States responded to North Korea's nuclear challenge with a combination of force and diplomacy which, although often improvised and lacking coherence, was equal to the seriousness of the issue. ●

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Tidbits & Outrages

A Bad Nose Job

The University of British Columbia has opened a breath-testing clinic for Canadians concerned about halitosis. Patients' breath will be both scientifically analyzed and checked by a human sniffer.

Judge Tyson

A West Virginia judge pleaded no contest and resigned from the bench after biting a defendant on the nose in his courtroom.

What's In a Name?

The new NBC show "Built To Last" was canceled three weeks after its debut.

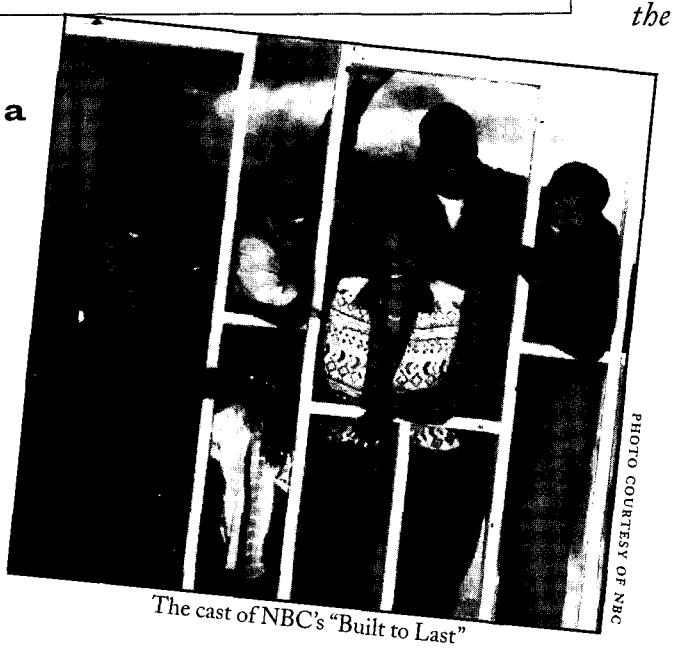

PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC

The cast of NBC's "Built to Last"

They Call It The Extra-Happy Meal

A woman in Pontiac, Mich., recently pleaded guilty to selling marijuana out of the drive-through window at a local Wendy's restaurant.

How Much For a Blueprint of the Watergate?

For $32.50 you can order a set of four coasters picturing President Richard Nixon shaking hands with Elvis from the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Catalog. A birdhouse model of Nixon's boyhood home is available for $45.

Will They Do a Line-up?

An Austrian fined for mooning German Chancellor Helmut Kohl has asked that Kohl appear in court to identify his behind.

Road Rage 101

A driver's ed teacher in Durham, N.C., was suspended for instructing a student driver to chase after a car that had cut them off and then punching the offending driver in the nose.

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EDIBLE COMPLEX

The real secret to Dean & Deluca's success: convincing Americans that good taste doesn't come cheap

BY PILAR GUZMAN

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 20TH BIRTHday of one of New York's most flavorful institutions—the Vatican of Vichyssoise, the Pantheon of Porcini, the Alhambra of Arugula: Dean & Deluca. With "you eat with your eyes first" as its mantra, the store's carefully cultivated mystique has lured countless pilgrims into its 9,700-square-feet of converted SoHo loft space since founding fathers Giorgio Deluca, Joel Dean, and Jack Ceglac first set up shop at the corner of Broadway and Prince. But make no mistake, this is more than just an overpriced gourmet grocery. With its signature medley of marble slabs and crusty breads, stainless steel and Moroccan trout, wooden crates and runny Stiltons, Dean & Deluca has pioneered an overall aesthetic that is more lifestyle museum than mere food Mecca.

As a seasoned Dean & Deluca voyeur, I was familiar with the sophisticated, bespectacled grad-student type that worked the cheese counter. And so it was that, finding myself with time on my hands between writing gigs and a hankering for cheese knowledge, I recently filled out an application to join their ranks. The store manager was perplexed by my eclectic and oddly unrelated job experience (not to mention a lack of retail experience of any sort), but he was clearly desperate and hopeful enough to take a chance on my earnest demeanor and conspicuous passion for all things edible. A life-long student, I treated my new job like any other academic undertaking. I taught myself the basics, did some extracurricular reading, and asked a lot of questions.

PILAR GUZMAN, *a freelance food and travel writer based in New York, is a regular contributor to* New York Daily News, Sidewalk.com, *and* Fodor's *travel books.*

The Glass Effect™

I spent the first week on the back counter learning proper Dean & Deluca cheese-wrapping techniques. I took great pride in stretching the Saran wrap to the point of creaselessness. The key, I was told, was to cut the plastic just the right size—excess Saran makes it difficult to achieve the necessary tension and too small a piece causes tears in the plastic, thus defeating the sealing function. It's one of those tricks of the trade that, once acquired, can be taken anywhere!

By day two, I was just starting to get the hang of it when suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I spied Giorgio Deluca—aesthetic czar, foodie, and former history teacher—across the marbled aisle. In the midst of his wildly gesticulative critique of the olive oil display, I could feel his eyes burning a hole into my novice cheese-wrapping hands. Uh-oh, he was heading toward me. With childlike logic, I reasoned that if our eyes didn't meet, he would somehow disappear. I assessed the unwrapped half-wheel of Pecorino Corsignano (a delightful aged Italian sheep's-milk cheese) and unrolled what I had calculated to be the proper amount of plastic. As I attempted to make the swift cut, his arrival broke my confident perforating stroke. The plastic began to pull and pucker. He nudged me aside and grabbed the cheese from my trembling hands, exclaiming, "Wrapping is the most important skill you can have at this counter. You gotta make it look like glass. 'The glass effect!' I invented that." The next thing I knew he was off tending to another matter at the espresso bar, responding to his uncanny, almost bionic, imperfection radar.

I decided to let the unfortunate Saran intervention roll off my back and refocus on my original mission: to master the cheeses in all of their delicious, subtle, nutty, creamy, full-flavor splendor. With a little help

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from my new friends, I learned to distinguish between the various French Basque sheep's-milk varieties, and what made those hard-to-get unpasteurized cheeses worth all the fuss. I became proficient (and downright cocky) at determining a Stilton's ripeness by assessing its color and texture. Soon I could rattle off the perfect assortment of dessert cheeses with my eyes closed.

As my cheese education progressed, I became intrigued by the seeming appropriateness of the cheeses each customer selected. As dogs often resemble their owners, cheese choosers reveal themselves in their selections. Before long, I was in one to two tries able to deduce the cheese a customer would die over (not including persons who are intimidated into buying the first thing you sample them).

Of course many shoppers, I found, had neither the need nor the desire for advice. Demi-cheese mondaines, in their polite disregard for your dairy drivel, can reduce you to Thumbelina size. Take Lauren Hutton, for instance, whom I watched skillfully determine the ripeness of Parmigiano Reggiano by scrutinizing the crunchy age crystals; or Laurie Anderson, who rattled off an impressive order of the triple-creme Explorateur, Manchego, a tarragon- and thyme-crusted goat's-milk cheese called Tomme Fleur Verte, and the scarce Colston Basset Stilton ... and who sweetly but swiftly rejected my suggestion for a fifth selection. And then there are the incognito A- and B-models who, despite never having consumed dairy products, attempt to forge some semblance of domesticity in their otherwise hectic club-going lives. They saunter through the aisles like giraffes, filling dwarfed shopping carts with bouquets of roughage and perhaps a chunk of Leerdammer Lite for company. And finally, of course, you have your Cruella de Ville types with mink-lined hats and blood red lipstick who arrive in full Technicolor splendor at 10 a.m. for their well-rehearsed cheese-platter requests: Reblochon, Blue d'Auvergne, Old Amsterdam aged gouda, Le Chevrot.

Cheese Wiz

Intoxicated by the magic of it all, I threw myself into the job. I erected beautifully stacked, multi-level cheese displays coupled with hand-scripted name cards that gave the counter a fresh-off-the-continent feel. I grew to relish even the most menial tasks in cheese maintenance, like the ceremonious ablution of a molding rind, which involves a delicate sponge bath in white vinegar. And not only would I turn my nose up at those who would deign scrunch their snouts in response to our counter's undeniable aroma, I would all but hiss at those who dared balk at our prices. I convinced myself that Manchego, a simple sheep's-milk cheese from La Mancha, was definitely worth the Dean & Deluca asking price of $19-a-pound.

What's remarkable is how many of my customers seemed to agree. If you're wondering how it is possible for a sane person to spend $5 on a shaving of very common cheese for your very common sandwich (or better yet $3 on a single green apple), consider that that's about how much the average souvenir will cost you these days. The D & D baguette you purchase is in essence a souvenir, symbolic of the whole Dean & Deluca experience, the sum of all the exquisite visual edible parts and the seamless Bob Fosse-like choreography of 150 toiling serfs. The same principle applies to the concession/gift stand purchase at any theater, sports arena, museum. Like any optimal immersive travel experience—say, eating that hot dog while peering over the side of the Eiffle Tower—one is simply willing to forgo their frugality of good sense. Which explains why literal souvenir hunters—German tourists who come in by the bus load in their Birkenstocks-with-socks and commando-style trekking gear; or perhaps Japanese women sporting Chanel bags and Hermes scarves—are unfazed, having consulted their guide books, by the store's exorbitant costs. Tourists generally don't bat an eye when asked to pay $10 for a small slice of cheese from their homeland, just as they would buy one of those ridiculous Statuettes of Liberty that are manufactured in Taiwan.

But what about the customers who should know better? The ones who live in New York? Here Dean & Deluca's appeal gets more complicated. Granted, the store's goods are of highest quality; it is a grueling selection process to make it to the floor, especially in produce. Organic cherry tomato sirens and supine Japanese eggplant line up like little Miss Universe beauties. Hediard lavender honey from France vies for trendy Belgian Chimay beer's primo slot. But by and large, while the quality of many of the products may be exceptional, the things that people generally buy at Dean & Deluca are on the whole unexceptional—tomatoes, basil, mozzarella, parmesan cheese, Coach Farms goat cheese—the kind of stuff found at just about any corner market.

More than a purveyor of fine produce, Dean & Deluca offers its regulars an element of fantasy, an escape from the mish-mash ugliness of every corner's Korean deli or the fluorescent uniformity of all supermarket chains. The genius of the Dean & Deluca is that it strikes a balance of the bountiful and the minimal—wealth that doesn't look like gluttony (because gluttony is reserved for the nouveau riche). It is rem-

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iniscent of the French or Italian central market but done in pure SoHo style—epic loft ceilings and all the right stainless steel touches. The store achieves a paradoxical industrial rusticity, at once both inviting like a country-kitchen table and Euro-aloof like the double-cheek kiss of a SoHo gallery keeper.

At its most profound level, Dean & Deluca is a warehouse full—not just of cheese, bread, and meats—but of manufactured, edible class, ripe for big American-style consumption. And what really keeps us coming back for more is a collective admission that America has no taste. How else would the store have the gall to charge $10.95/lb for Grafton Cheddar from Vermont? Or $10.95 for smoked gouda, which is essentially a processed cheese? Not to put too fine a point on it, we are chumps. The success of Dean & Deluca hinges on the assumption that Americans have indiscriminate and impressionable palates and that culinary sophistication and classic taste can be bought. Anyone who knows anything about food doesn't regularly shop at Dean & Deluca. They might go there to browse or as a last attempt to find, say, a delicious goat's milk cheese called Crottin de Chavignol, resigning themselves to the fact that they will pay three times its retail cost anywhere else. It is the rest of us, insecure in our food savvy, who seek out the tasteful security Dean & Deluca offers. In paying twice its cost elsewhere, we collectively confirm that Dean & Deluca's Grafton Cheddar must somehow be superior to the one at the A & P.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL FLOWERS

Cheese, glorious cheese!

The Cheese Goes Sour

So how did such a promising $7-an-hour career at Dean & Deluca end? Inevitably, after a bit of time on the other side of the counter, I no longer felt transported to that wonderful world of the Tuscan kitchen. After all, my job as one of the performers was to endure the less-than-glamorous realities in order to help manufacture its myth. The unwritten part of the chorus girl job description goes as follows: look the other way while management threatens to fire a 7-months-pregnant employee for not tucking in her untuckable shirt (you can now find her at Gourmet Garage); feign indifference when you get frisked on your way out the door for leftover baguettes that go in the dump moments after workers swipe out; embrace a brand of corporate downsizing that lays off pittance-an-hour workers while taking on more high-end "consultants," each of whom has his own definite and invaluable opinion about where the new cracker displays should be set up. On my final, fateful evening there, two henchmen with Welcome-Back-Kotter-hair escorted me into the principal's office, 10 minutes to closing. Surrounded by a pack of mid- to high-level management, I was fired because of a "bad attitude" that was "beginning to rub off on the others." Boo hoo. All I could think about were those pieces of unwrapped Gorgonzola Dolce and Shropshire Blue, a blue-veined and potentially oozy English Cheddar on the back counter, and how I wouldn't be cleaning up that night. I had heard that when you get fired, you have to leave on the spot, lest you go postal. I just felt badly for the pastry floater who would have to close on his own.

I took my time leaving, saying good-bye to the lovely ladies in bread, high-fiving the affable charcuterie department, tiptoeing around the skittish pasta marm who is notorious for hurling clipboards at just about anyone who crosses her. On my way out the front, I bid my adieus to the gals in pastry, one of whom whispered in my ear that she had just put in a bid to a guy "who could have that pig's legs broken." It was all too ridiculous. And appropriate.

As I walked along Prince Street, the next thing I knew I was at a wonderfully disorganized Korean market, an uncontrollable cheshire grin on my face, ordering a plain old cheese sandwich: white bread and an anonymous American cheddar. The Saran wrap was a little puckered and the bread came out of a plastic bag, but it cost 93 cents and it couldn't have been better. ●

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The Monthly's Holiday Book List

Books reviewed favorably in our pages in 1997

A Spy for All Seasons, by Duane R. Clarridge

A Wrongful Death, by Léon Bing

Anatomy of a Miracle, by Patti Waldmeir

Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater, by John Brody

Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen, by Jervis Anderson

Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice, by Kathy Rudy

Butter and Guns, by Diane B. Kunz

Citizen Soldiers, by Stephen Ambrose

The Coming Race War in America, by Carl Rowan

Common Purpose, by Lisbeth B. Schorr

Conspiracy, by Daniel Pipes

The Corner, by David Simon and Edward Burns

Defense Addiction, by Sanford Gottlieb

Dereliction of Duty, by H.F. McMaster

Disarmed and Dangerous, by Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady

Disunited States, by John D. Donahue

Dossier: The Secret History of Armand Hammer, by Edward J. Epstein

Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism, by James G. Ryan

Echo House, by Ward Just

The Excuse Factory, by Walter K. Olson

The Fall of Che Guevara, by Henry Butterfield Ryan

Faubus, by Roy Reed

The File: A Personal History, by Timothy Garton Ash

George Ball, by James A. Bill

Glued to the Set, by Steven D. Stark

Health Against Wealth, by George Anders

Joycelyn Elders M.D., by Dr. Joycelyn Elders

The Kennedy Tapes, by Ernest May and Philip Zelikow

Kremlin Capitalism, by Joseph R. Blasi, Maya Kroumova, and Douglas Kruse

Making the Corps, by Thomas Ricks

Mirage, by George Hager and Eric Pianin

Money, by Andrew Hacker

Mount Misery, by Samuel Shem

Mutual Contempt, by Jeff Shesol

My Years With Gorbachev, by Pavel Palazchenko

The New Federalist Papers, by Alan Brinkley, Nelson W. Polsby, and Kathleen M. Sullivan

The New War, by Sen. John Kerry

The Other Americans, by Joel Millman

Paris in the Fifties, by Stanley Karnow

The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them, by E.D. Hirsch

Sentinel Under Siege, by Stanley S. Flink

The State of the Nation, by Derek Bok

Taking Charge, by Michael Beschloss

Translating History, by Igor Korchilov

Unlocking the Cabinet, byRobert B. Reich

Willie Brown, by James Richardson

The Witch Doctors, by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge

Wry Martinis, by Christopher Buckley

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On Political Books

If you have a child or grandchild of high school age, chances are you are all too painfully aware of the approaching college applications season. For the next few months, students across the nation will be sharpening their number two pencils, padding their resumés, and pouring their young hearts out in unctuous "personal essays"—all part of a desperate quest to gain admission to "the right school." The process can be grueling, ulcer-inducing, and ultimately dispiriting.

But if the meritocracy's annual rite of winter fills you with despair, the following two book reviews will offer a measure of hope. Both are written by graduates of that bastion of snob appeal, Harvard University. Jay Mathews, who's also served as an alumni interviewer, explains how your life need not necessarily be ruined if you don't get into an Ivy League college. And Joshua Wolf Shenk demonstrates how, rather than fulfilling a life-long dream, those who do get in may be embarking on a nightmare.

Harvard Schmarvard

Getting into the Ivy League is neither as hard—nor as important—as the meritocratic elites make it out to be

by Jay Mathews

I HAVE VOLUNTEERED AS A HARVARD alumni interviewer for the past 15 years. Applicants to the college, sometimes as many as a dozen each year, come to my home. I talk to each of them for about an hour. I write a one- or two-page report on their intellectual and personal strengths. I rate each one on Harvard's 1 (future Nobel laureate) to 6 (potential embezzler) scale, choosing numbers (usually 2s or 3s) to describe their academic, extra-curricular, personal, and overall qualities. Then I mail the result to Cambridge.

I have many comforting explanations for doing this. I say that chatting with bright high school seniors is a fine way to stay in touch with succeeding generations. I feel some obligation to Harvard, not so much for the education it provided but because the student newspaper, and the woman I fell in love with there, changed my life. My wife is also an interviewer, and I enjoy sharing that interest with her.

A IS FOR ADMISSION: The Ultimate Insider's Guide to Getting into the Ivy League and Other Top Colleges
By Michele A. Hernandez
Warner Books, $24
and
HOW TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL WITHOUT REALLY LEARNING: The Credentials Race in American Education
By David F. Labaree
Yale, $35

But I have no doubt the most important reason I interview for Harvard is the thrill I get from helping sort what I think of, with less and less justification, as the American elite. It is not pleasant for the child of egalitarian parents to confess a love for preserving the pecking order, but it is clear I have those feelings.

I may be more susceptible to this infatuation with illusions of the meritocracy since, at 52, I represent that large chunk of the middle class that grew up after World War II defining themselves not by the old standard of whether they went to college, but where. I attended a California suburban high school that rarely sent graduates to the Ivy League. My mother, a UCLA graduate, was not happy about my going to Harvard, which she thought grew out of snob appeal. I now think she was right, but that has not stopped me from placing my own children in public

JAY MATHEWS *is an education reporter for* The Washington Post. Class Struggle, *his book on how elite public high schools both help and hurt their students, is due out in March.*

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and private high schools where a mother who did not want her boy to go to Harvard would be greeted with a tactfulness usually reserved for the elderly or the ill.

As a journalist, I have heard enough life stories to know that Ivy League matriculation has little if anything to do with how close people come to their dreams of power, wealth, love, and fulfillment. Character traits and financial resources bestowed long before they take the SAT seem to dictate most choices. A 17-year-old who yearns to be a dentist in New Jersey seems, at least to me, to be as likely to reach that goal if she attends Yale or Cal State L.A.

Nonetheless, Ivy League students have an unappealing tendency to assume they will one day rule the world. That faith erodes only gradually as they see the widening gap between their expectations and their lives. Emotional illness, alcoholism, bad marriages, bad luck, ennui—the red-bound class reports I receive every five years from Cambridge are full of accounts of dreams abandoned or severely revised.

At my office, the limits of the Ivy mystique are evident. *The Washington Post* has a reputation for elitist hiring. Ivies fill newsroom slots far out of proportion to our share of the American population. But the executive editor to whom we all report has two degrees from Ohio State. Among the likeliest successors to the managing editor, a Yale man, are graduates of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Florida, and Occidental. The assistant managing editor for metropolitan news, who has the most reporters and more say than anyone over what I do, studied at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The publisher went to Harvard but that is unlikely to have had much to do with his success.

Flip through the *Almanac of American Politics* and note the alma maters of the political elite. Here are the colleges attended by the first 25 governors listed: Auburn, Yale, Harvard, Ouachita Baptist, Yale, Yale, Villanova, Ohio State, Florida, Georgia, Berkeley, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas Wesleyan, Kentucky, LSU, Dartmouth, Florida State, Harvard, Michigan State, Williams, Purdue, George Washington. Let us try U.S. senators, starting in the back and going forward: George Washington, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Wisconsin, Harvard, American, Washington State, Dartmouth, Wisconsin, Washington & Lee, Yale, St. Michael's, Utah, BYU, Texas, Georgia, Princeton, Memphis State, South Dakota, South Dakota State, the Citadel, Clemson, West Point, Yale, Penn State.

Venture outside the northeastern megalopolis or beyond the pricier parts of the Los Angeles basin and Chicago's North Shore and you find the number of young people seeking Ivy admission substantially reduced. Many of them, even those with 1500 SAT scores, are far more interested in attending their state's best public university.

Michele A. Hernandez, a defrocked Dartmouth admissions officer, inadvertently reveals this little-noticed resistance to the green doors and sherry in the common room at the very beginning of her book, *A Is For Admission*. Every other page bears the unmistakable message that your life may be over if you are denied admission to Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, or Yale. But Hernandez slips, just this once, and reveals that other schools, astonishingly less fashionable, are just as selective as the magic eight. If the Ivy League were actually defined, as it is in the public imagination, as those schools most likely to reject your children, the list would be different. Here is Hernandez's compilation of the most selective schools, using acceptance percentages culled from *Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges 1997*:

1.	Harvard:	12 percent
2.	Princeton:	14 percent
3.	Amherst:	19 percent
4.	Stanford:	19 percent
5.	Yale:	20 percent
6.	Brown:	21 percent
7.	Georgetown:	22 percent
8.	Dartmouth:	22 percent
9.	Columbia:	23 percent
10.	Williams:	26 percent
11.	Rice:	26 percent
12.	MIT:	27 percent
13.	Duke:	29 percent
14.	Bowdoin:	30 percent

Amherst, Williams, Stanford, Georgetown, and Duke have long been accepted as Ivy equivalents among those high school students and parents who care about such things. But Rice and Bowdoin, despite their academic strength, are not big brand names in Scarsdale and La Jolla. Notice that two genuine Ivies, Penn (33 percent) and Cornell (34 percent) do not reach this level of exclusivity. Hernandez defines highly selective schools as any that accept 35 percent or less of their applicants, just enough to include all the Ivies. But that cuts out all the still independent women's colleges, the remnants of the prestigious Seven Sisters. Anyone who thinks this leaves the high-rent neighborhood college hot list unscathed should gather a group of nervous mothers on the Upper West Side and carefully watch their faces as some are told their children have been admitted to Vassar and Wellesley, and others hear they must accept Rice or Bowdoin instead.

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I am not certain why Hernandez does not pursue the notion that American teenagers are not quite as enamored of the Ivy League and its clones as she and her publishers are. I suspect when she was still an admissions officer she gave, or at least was tempted to give, the short speech I deliver to Harvard applicants several times a year:

> This can be an irrational process, like being struck by lightning. Cambridge picks some kids for reasons that elude me and rejects some that I think are wonderful. You should realize that with your fine record you are going to get into a splendid college. You are lucky to be living in a country with the strongest and most open system of higher education in the world. Wherever you go, the place is going to have what you need. You just have to be ready to grab it when you get there.

Perhaps Hernandez's editor at Warner Books squelched any urge she might have had to add this disclaimer. The commercial hopes for the book are very high and that sometimes leads authors to promise too much. Hernandez says in her introduction that "reading this book ... will greatly improve your chances of being accepted at an Ivy League or other highly selective college." I doubt it, but that does not mean there are not many who want to believe.

It will not hurt to read the book. Some applicants will likely ease their suffering by knowing that a polite call from them to an admissions officer can help when they are on the wait list, while a call from their parents or a private admissions consultant to that same admissions officer can ruin them. Hernandez also provides good advice on what high school courses to take, how to handle the application essay and what to do about extracurricular activities.

If only she had resisted the temptation to devote 30 pages to what the book jacket calls a "trade secret," the Academic Index used by Dartmouth and a few other schools to measure academic strength. It is useful to know that achievement tests (what are called the SAT II these days) are important, but Hernandez's murky analysis of the AI, with mathematical formulae and footnotes, reveals little more than that students with mediocre grades and scores are not likely to get in.

Most unfortunately, despite a few mild warnings against parental interference and paranoia, Hernandez bows to the sanctity of the sorting process with a fervor that makes brain surgeons with Harvard Med School degrees sound like a 19th century prairie populists. My favorite moment is her nose-in-the-air assessment of other Ivy League admissions officers:

> They may consist of graduate students; former teachers; spouses of professors and college staff; and career administrators. The majority of this group did not graduate from any highly selective college, let alone an Ivy League one. ... [Many] are not expert readers ... and most of them are not scholars or intellectuals. Add to this problem the above factors and you can understand why oftentimes subtle points are overlooked even though they can be crucial to understanding a student's academic potential.

My, my. I cannot wait to use some of this language the next time one of my non-Ivy editors fails to appreciate a point in my always subtle news stories. As well-read as Hernandez seems to think she is, she gives no sign of ever having heard of Howard Gardner or any other research on forms of intelligence unrelated to English mid-terms. "What I am trying to say without shocking too much," she says, "is that the very best of applicants will often be brighter than many of those who will be evaluating them."

Credentials are everything to Hernandez. She is particularly impatient with admissions officers who do not pay proper respect to applicants from the best prep schools or those with parents who run their own companies. To be honest, she is right in tune with us alumni interviewers who enjoy assessing and influencing academic success—a form of resumé worship that David F. Labaree addresses in his book, *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning*.

Labaree does a chemical analysis of the fuel that drives American high schools, particularly the Ivy-envy that leads bright young people to forgo the pleasures of a Sunday afternoon for an hour's chat in my living room. He describes three goals of public education: democratic equality (knowing enough to vote), social efficiency (knowing enough to get a job) and social mobility (knowing enough to get a really good job). He thinks the system puts too much emphasis on this last ingredient:

> From the perspective of social mobility ... the value of education is not intrinsic but extrinsic. The primary aim is to exchange one's education for something more substantial—namely a job, which will provide the holder with a comfortable standard of living, financial security, social power, and cultural prestige. ... This emerging independence of educational exchange value from its connection to usable knowledge is the most persuasive explanation for many of the most highly visible characteristics of contemporary educational life—such as overcredentialing (the chronic overproduction of advanced degrees relative to the occupational need for advanced skills) and credential inflation (the rising

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level of educational attainment required for jobs whose skill requirements are largely unchanged).

Sadly, the analysis fails to provide any clue as to how to make schools better. If you cannot motivate high school students with the prospect of good jobs or prestigious titles or at least envious looks from old schoolyard adversaries, what can you use? The implication of Labaree's book is that teachers should celebrate the romance of freedom and the need for all to appreciate the fabric of democracy. It might be amusing to watch a Fairfax County high school history teacher of my acquaintance, afflicted with a class composed almost entirely of hormone-addled boys, explain to his students that if they did not do their homework they would lose a civilizing sense of their place in a democratic society.

There are ways to tie productive learning tighter to worthy credentials. Scrapping the SAT I would be a good start. It seems silly to rely so much on a test of vocabulary and arithmetic, mostly learned before students reach high school, as a measure of readiness for college. Growing numbers of American high schools are introducing and expanding Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. These are not yet seen as an alternative to the SAT I, but allied with the SAT II they could be. They are tests that measure real, high-level learning, and Hernandez is right when she says that colleges are paying more attention to them.

Such welcome developments can still be distorted by us sorters. Last year I lost control of myself when one Harvard applicant, a pleasant youngster with a splendid business career ahead of him, told me he had not taken any Advanced Placement courses despite the fact that his high school had one of the strongest AP programs in the country. I told him I was very sorry to hear that. I said I thought he had been poorly advised. I said I could not see how anyone could expect admission to Harvard, or any of the other Ivies to which he had applied, without risking at least one demonstrably challenging high school course.

There was nothing he could say. I was the unchallengeable arbiter of who got into Harvard and who did not. I held the key to the gate. When I realized what I had done, I apologized and tried to reassure him that he still had many good choices ahead of him. I arranged for him to see another, hopefully less biased, interviewer.

But it has been difficult for me to forget my unbidden resentment that someone would dare to try to get by me without the proper pass. I hope I have matured since, but I cannot be sure. ●

Poisoned Ivy

For some students, getting into Harvard is the easy part

by Joshua Wolf Shenk

HALFWAY HEAVEN: Diary of a Harvard Murder
By Melanie Thernstrom
Doubleday, $23.95

AN EARLY 20TH CENTURY building perched aside the Charles River, Dunster House is known among Harvard undergraduates for its grand common spaces and awkward, cramped living quarters. And so, when police entered suite H-22 on May 28, 1995, the bodies were not hard to find. On the floor in the first of two small rooms, Trang Phuong Ho lay dead of 45 stab wounds, including 11 in the head, chest, and neck. Sinedu Tadesse, her roommate of two years, hung by a noose in a shower.

The story's basic outline was quickly apparent. Tadesse, a 21-year-old Ethiopian whose already deep troubles had festered in her three years at Harvard, had killed her roommate after Ho, a sweet, diligent, pre-med student, insisted on living with others the following year.

But this explanation raised as many questions as it answered. By what path did Tadesse descend into violent madness? What, if anything, had Harvard done to help her? And what meaning could be taken from the fact that these brutal acts—the killing of another and the killing of self—had taken place at a uni-

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versity which many consider synonymous with knowledge and human progress? Several days before her death, Tadesse dropped off her picture at the offices of Harvard's daily paper, *The Crimson*, with a note that advised, "KEEP this picture. There will soon be a very juicy story involving the person in this picture." But what is that story really about?

Melanie Thernstrom tries to answer these questions in *Halfway Heaven*, a meditative "diary" of the murder-suicide. Thernstrom's relentlessly self-conscious style is sometimes tedious. But ultimately the book succeeds in highlighting the two critical themes of this tragedy: First, this is a story about mental illness and the mysteries of its depths, causes, and cures. Second, it is the story of a rarely seen side of Harvard University—the self-interested bureaucracy that is less interested in student welfare or truth than in protecting its reputation.

Sinedu Tadesse was clearly a troubled young woman when she matriculated to Harvard from an elite private school in Ethiopia. She grew up under military rule; 30,000 people died in an official campaign of terror that began when she was two years old. A political prisoner for several years, her father was one of the junta's many victims, and the children were raised to be paranoid and distrustful. At home, "there was no comfort to seek ... no warmth," Tadesse wrote later.

By virtue of exceptional test scores, Tadesse won a coveted spot in a school for diplomats and foreigners. But her outward achievement was matched with intense loneliness. The summer after her freshman year at Harvard, Tadesse confessed these feelings in a letter that she sent to strangers, picked at random from phone books and Internet chat groups. "As far as I can remember my life has been hellish," she wrote:

> Year after year, I became lonelier and lonelier. I see friends deserting me. They would take every chance to show me they did not have any love or respect for me.... High school turned out to be even worse.... If I went early or left late, I would be roaming the yard or deserted hallways alone while other students roared with laughter or talked their hearts out standing in groups. Home was not a comforting place. I swallowed my pain and anguish just as my siblings did to theirs. I was so lonely. But I hung on tight because I wanted to come to the States in search of a solution.

There is a moment in time, always difficult to discern, where common feelings of unhappiness verge into depression, where the vocabulary of ordinary experience should be discarded for the vocabulary of disease. By the end of her freshman year—by the time she told her life story to strangers and begged them for "a few hours from your week ... please do not close the door in my face"—Sinedu Tadesse had certainly crossed that line. Desperate for friends, she found herself paralyzed in social situations. She was thrilled to find a roommate for sophomore year, but when this friendship proved to be less than perfect, Tadesse relapsed into bitterness and anxiety—with an edge of mounting rage. The roommate, of course, was Trang Ho.

Looking for a Villain

When she decided to attend Harvard, Tadesse was surely drawn to the mystique captured by Thomas Wolfe in *Look Homeward Angel*: "It was rich magic, wealth, elegance, joy, proud loneliness, rich books and golden browsing; it was an enchanted name like Cairo and Damascus."

Tadesse may or may not have been warned that the university was also famously indifferent to its undergraduates. For a lost young woman, thousands of miles from home without friends, Harvard offered nothing except a two-hour orientation for foreign students and occasional therapy sessions—with a doctor of education. (Shortly before the murder/suicide, the therapist tried to reach Tadesse. Not because he sensed danger for his patient, but because he wanted to cancel an appointment.)

Far from the "solution" Tadesse sought, it is hard to imagine an environment worse for her than Harvard. Even the best-adjusted and most-confident high schoolers can be reduced to quivers there. Many students find a niche—academic, social, extracurricular—that allows them to enjoy, rather than be threatened by, the exceptional talents of their peers. But in such a highly-charged atmosphere, the search can be daunting and fraught with obstacles. The first academic experience for many students is applying to freshman seminars and being turned down by most, or all. Tadesse, in fact, had been rejected for a seminar taught by Thernstrom, for which she had more than 100 applicants. "It was an unfortunate system," Thernstrom writes, "that in order to take a writing class to learn you had to prove you were already accomplished—but it was the way many things were done at Harvard."

Harvard also does little to attend to students' emotional lives, though the qualities it seeks—creativity, intensity, passion—often coincide with vulnerability. "Achievement," Thernstrom writes, "can stem from insecurity, a need to prove oneself better than every-

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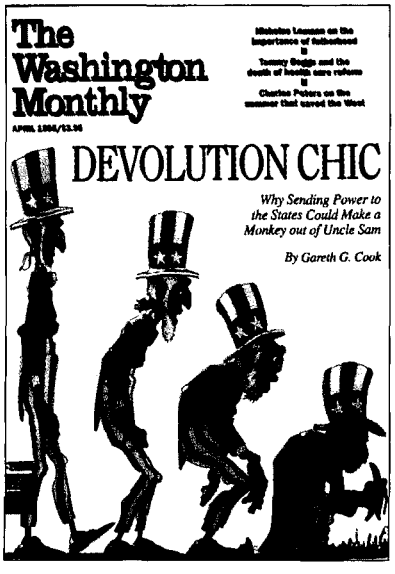

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one else, or from depression—a need to make oneself feel better—as much as it can from talent or a desire to contribute to the world."

Harvard's environment can exacerbate these problems, as a former professor of mine, Pat C. Hoy II, illuminates in his *Sewanee Review* essay "Soldiers and Scholars," which was later excerpted by *Harvard Magazine*. Hoy came to Harvard in 1988 after 14 years as a professor of English at West Point and he was struck, he writes, "that Harvard students often become destructive when alcohol or sheer frustration break down their thin layer of civilized restraint." At West Point, students are steeped in the values of teamwork and cooperation even when they're being put through grueling drills. Harvard is different. "If the greater world reveals itself only to those courageous and daring enough to re-imagine and test the very foundations of knowledge," Hoy writes, "Harvard seems to believe its task is to nurture and develop minds unsettled and unsettling enough to look into the darkness." And so it is no coincidence that students "lash out at one another, or ... on the way back ... from a night of partying, they turn destructive and walk on cars, smash glass entryway doors, violate one another's bodies."

Hoy was also an academic adviser at Mather House, next door to Dunster, and he was not alone in his commitment to understanding his students. But, for the most part, Harvard provides a very poor safety net for this highly volatile student body. Its counseling resources are thin and its academic advisors are often unqualified, lackadaisical, or overcommitted. Thernstrom briefly discusses Damian Schloming, who drew as his freshman advisor John Fox, an esteemed former dean of the college. This might seem like an advantage, since most advisors are graduate students or low-level faculty. (Mine was an admissions officer.) But Fox is distant and unsympathetic. "I have received my medical care from the University for over forty years and am entirely satisfied," he responds to one of Damian's pleadings about his need for counseling and medication. "Your attacks on all things Harvard are tiresome. If you don't like it here go away."

This kind of arrogance isn't unusual. And that leads to the aspect of the book which, aside from the two deaths, I find most depressing. For many institutions, such a tragedy might force self-examination and lead to change. But Harvard's response was defensive, paranoid, and accusatory. "In a case of this complexity," Dean of the College Fred Jewett told Thernstrom, "we prefer to centralize information. Everyone is looking for a villain and we don't want to be it."

Reading accounts of Harvard's behavior in this affair, it is hard not to think of it as more a shadowy corporation—with an $11 billion endowment to protect—than an institution of learning. At a faculty meeting, a dean instructed attendees not to talk to the press. Cambridge police were refused essential interviews and documents and eventually had to cede the investigation to Harvard's own police, which Cambridge detectives found less than forthcoming. (A top detective told Thernstrom that the university regularly fails to report suicides, "by mistake.") Thernstrom reports the salient fact that Harvard, used to throwing its weight around in legal disputes, has 11 in-house lawyers. MIT, by comparison, has none.

Dunster House, where I lived as a Harvard student from 1990 to 1993, was a caricature of Harvard's style, combining ineptitude and authoritarianism. House officials had a copy of the desperate letter that Tadesse had written to strangers—a letter that includes the phrase "if I live"—but it's unclear what they did with it. Karel Liem, the senior faculty member in charge of Dunster House, told police he had read the letter, then denied to Thernstrom ever having seen it. After the deaths, Liem told *Boston Magazine* that "I had no inkling there was a problem." Liem's deputy, the house's "senior tutor," was out of town at the time of the deaths—though the term was not yet over, she was already on vacation. Meanwhile, Dunster House tutors who talked to Thernstrom later retracted their comments, saying they feared being fired. In a previous controversy, Liem had fired tutors who spoke to *The Crimson*. Afterwards, his contract was extended.

It should be said that Trang Ho, a victim unfortunately overshadowed by her murderer, seemed to thrive at Harvard. And whether the school deserves "blame" is a complicated question; Tadesse's path to that Sunday morning is a thicket of familial, biological, and social problems.

Still, Harvard is held to a higher standard by its own asking. It is a community, Harvard president Charles Eliot said in 1869, that "stands firmest for the public honor." But stonewalling and zealously denying responsibility hardly seems like the honorable course in the aftermath of two student deaths. Though Harvard is steeped in history—the lectures of Emerson, the scholarship of William James, the education of John Kennedy—many there don't seem to understand that unflattering, even horrific, history may be the most important to remember, so that it doesn't repeat itself. Sinedu Tadesse and Trang Ho would have graduated in June of 1996. At the commencement exercises, they were never mentioned.

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The Hedgerows Were Deadly

And no one was warned

by Charles W. Bailey

CITIZEN SOLDIERS: The U.S. Army From the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany
By Stephen E. Ambrose
Simon & Schuster, $27.50

STEPHEN AMBROSE HAS WRITTEN a lot of good books, including a three-volume biography of Richard Nixon and no fewer than six books about Dwight D. Eisenhower as soldier and president. Last year his account of the Lewis and Clark expedition won high critical praise. Now, with *Citizen Soldiers*, the story of the defeat of Germany in 1944 and 1945, he completes a magisterial two-volume account of the climactic year of World War II in Western Europe.

Most Americans today are too young to remember first-hand that final year of the European war. Older people tend to think of it in terms of the successful landings on D-Day, followed by the liberation of Paris and the surrender of Germany. Some also recall the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler's last great counteroffensive in December 1944.

But almost no one except the surviving participants has any comprehension of the vicious, unrelenting, blood-stained conflict that continued through every day and every night of the 11 months from D-Day to the German surrender on V-E Day. *Citizen Soldiers* fills that gap. In the process, Ambrose has produced not only an authoritative history but a powerful and painful anti-war testament as well.

As the title suggests, Ambrose tells his story through the eyes and voices of the front-line troops—the captains and lieutenants, the sergeants and corporals and privates who did all of the fighting and most of the dying. These young men, many of them less than a year out of high school, are the heroes of this book. Ambrose sets out his main themes at the very beginning:

> Normandy was a soldier's battle. It belonged to the riflemen, machine gunners, mortarmen, tankers, and artillerymen who were on the front lines. There was no room for maneuver. ... There was a simplicity to the fighting: for the Germans, to hold; for the Americans, to attack. Where they would hold or attack required no decision-making: it was always the next village or field ....

Ambrose is deservedly kind to his front-line subjects. On the other hand, he is coldly critical of some strategic judgments by top commanders—including Eisenhower—and of the intelligence staffs at higher headquarters whose misjudgments and omissions unnecessarily raised the bloodshed in the front lines.

Ambrose is particularly critical of what he labels "one of the greatest intelligence failures of all time." The failure of planners to warn the Allied assault forces that the Normandy countryside they were about to enter was criss-crossed with hedgerows—six-foot earthen banks topped with dense vegetation. They made perfect terrain for defense, but they were hell for would-be attackers. One U.S. officer described the hedgerow fighting this way: "Thus goes the battle—a rush, a pause, some creeping, a few isolated shots, some artillery fire, some mortars, some smoke, more creeping, another pause, dead silence, more firing, a great concentration of fire followed by a concerted rush. Then the whole process starts over again."

The hedgerows had been there for hundreds of years, but somehow they escaped the notice of the invasion planners. As a result, American company commanders and platoon leaders had to start from scratch to devise new tactics and teach them to their

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CHARLES W. BAILEY, *a former Washington correspondent for* The Minneapolis Tribune, *is a member of the editorial advisory board of* The Washington Monthly.

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men under enemy fire. The tuition fee was payable in blood—blood that need not have been so freely spent had the rear-echelon planners done a better job.

It took American and other Allied forces seven weeks to fight through the hedgerow country. When they did, the war changed: Complete air superiority, a phenomenal supply capability, and a steady flow of replacements to the battered American infantry units enabled the Allies to take advantage of the open country to outflank and then crush the German army in France. Many top U.S. commanders—even such level-headed men as Eisenhower and Gen. Omar Bradley—began to think in terms of finishing off the Germans by the end of 1944.

But they were wrong, as the front-line U.S. troops who met and measured the enemy first-hand could have told them. As soon as the Americans crossed the border into Germany, the German army came back to life, reorganizing and re-equipping the shattered units, shoving 15- and 16-year old boys into combat, and stubbornly contesting every inch of ground.

But the generals (with a few admirable exceptions) never got to the front lines or talked with the men who slept, ate, and fought in muddy or icy foxholes. The allied commanders ordered continuing attacks against the stiffening German resistance. The result was three months of grinding, bloody, and inconclusive fighting. There was a particularly bitter struggle in the German city of Aachen. U.S. losses were over 5,000; the Germans lost about the same number—plus another 5,000 captured. The ancient city was completely destroyed. Ambrose's verdict: "The Battle of Aachen benefited no one. The Americans never should have attacked. The Germans never should have defended. Neither side had a choice. This was war at its worst, wanton destruction for no purpose."

He is similarly critical of another battle that fall, in the Hurtgen Forest: "The Battle of Hurtgen [was] started on the basis of a plan that was grossly, even criminally stupid.... The Americans took the forest but lost the battle of Hurtgen, and too many good men. The battle did not shorten the war by one minute."

American combat units in the final months of the war were mainly manned by enlisted men who had been drafted in 1943 or early 1944. They replaced veterans of earlier fighting who were mostly dead or crippled, their luck having run out after months of daily fighting. Example: One infantry company entered combat on September 1, 1944, with a full complement of 193 officers and enlisted men. By V-E Day, eight months later, 625 men had served in the company. Of those, 51 had been killed, 183 had been wounded, and 167 had been knocked out of action by trenchfoot or frostbite. Thus combat or combat-related losses had caused a turnover of more than 200 percent in this one unit—which was by no means untypical.

Ambrose includes separate chapters on the U.S. Army's combat medical services (which he finds wonderful), the replacement system (which he thinks terrible), the air forces, and the experiences of Americans in German prisoner-of-war camps. Each adds something to his overall account; but the power of this book lies in its grim recitation of the unrelenting day-to-day war of the infantryman.

It is more than half a century now since the American citizen soldiers fought across France and Germany, but their story remains painfully relevant today. Stephen Ambrose has paid eloquent homage to these men, and has given the rest of us a powerful reminder of what war really is.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

GIs move forward through the breach in a hedgerow made by a bulldozer. July 25, 1944.

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A Parallel Universe

The growing gap between military and civilian values, and why it's a problem

By Amy Waldman

MAKING THE CORPS
By Thomas Ricks
Scribner, $24

YOUNG AMERICAN MALES arrive at the Marine Corps Parris Island boot camp with sitcom-stuffed brains, fat-riddled bodies, and spirits drained of purpose. They are soft in every sense. When they leave, they have been emptied out, broken down, and built back up. They are muscled and strong, able and even eager to endure pain. More than that, they are better people, stripped of prejudices and instilled with discipline. They aspire toward excellence. They disdain selfishness.

That end product—confident young men capable of handling extraordinary responsibility—understandably fascinated Thomas Ricks, *The Wall Street Journal*'s Pentagon reporter, when he observed Marines on patrol in Somalia, so he followed his curiosity to the source. When Platoon 3086 was deposited on Parris Island in 1995, Ricks was there, and he was still there eleven weeks later when those who had survived graduated into the Marines' elite ranks. Then he followed many of the recruits when they left the island's hermetic conditions to return to an imperfect, temptation-filled civilian world.

His observations made for a remarkable *Journal* article, and now they form the core of a compelling book on the corps. He shows how the Marines remake their charges, and he examines how the institution remade itself from the lows of the 1970s. This is really a book about values: their absence in society, their transmission in the corps, and the growing gap between the two. And it is a wake-up call: That cultural alienation, Ricks suggests, has the potential to become not just a matter of sociological interest, but a danger to society.

The Marines are the smallest and poorest of the military's armed services, but they are also the proudest, an elite that relies not on big boats or planes, but brawn, brains, and history for its identity. "People may be enticed into the Army or Air Force by the prospect of vocational training and GI educational benefits," Ricks writes, "but they enlist in the Marines to measure, better, or change themselves—and to have an adventure." Some come also because of tradition, and the prestige of what Ricks calls the working class's Ivy League.

Those reasons lure a motley crew to Platoon 3086: a black gang member, a former white supremacist, a pacifist Dutch-American; a bond trader's son, and dozens of working-class denizens who see the Marines as perhaps their last escape from lives dead-ending at Taco Bell. They are all deposited in the swamps of South Carolina, where their hair is shorn and their possessions and pasts stripped. They wade into a blizzard of orders, insults, and constant, grueling activity, deliberately designed to disorient. Saying "I" is a cardinal sin: It shows they are thinking of themselves, not the unit. A thread hanging from a uniform is a sign of disrespect for themselves and their superiors, a lack of attention to detail. The treatment seems cruel, arbitrary, even brutal, but it is carefully structured. "They learn that if they follow orders, their life will be calmer," says one sergeant, offering a rationale the recruits are never privy to. (Ricks himself might have done more to make clear how the seemingly arbitrary hazing and abuse pays off in battle, when disobeying orders or placing your life above others or not doing your best, can be life- and mission-threatening.)

If boot camp is to succeed, it must do more than reshape bodies; it must alter mentalities. Drill instructors, formidable characters who have made the corps their life, do that partly by example: They are tireless, and their dedication to the Marines is bottomless. They do it partly by humiliation and haranguing. And they do it partly by cunning, forcing, for example, the white supremacist and black gang member to share a tent during Basic Warrior Training. They emerge

AMY WALDMAN *is a reporter for* The New York Times.

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friends. (Ricks notes that while the Marines have not done as well as the Army at ending racial strain or promoting blacks, they have done much better than society. But there is no easy way to replicate in society the close proximity and shared enterprise of boot camp.)

Ricks' detailed week-by-week chronology of the recruits' experience tends to reflect their lows and highs, lagging during repetitive exercises such as rifle training, and climaxing during Basic Warrior Training, or "Warrior Week," when the recruits go into the woods for a dose of crawling through the mud and a taste of real combat, and return, says Ricks, "more Marine than not."

Ricks uses this section to provide a history of the corps, which has resurrected itself from the lows of the post-Vietnam era, when it was rife with crime and drugs and riddled with substandard recruits. The Marines, Ricks says, ultimately were rescued by two men: James Webb, a Vietnam veteran and novelist whose books chronicled the alienation between elites and the military and heavily influenced the outlook of those who served after him; and Alfred Gray, the no-nonsense grunt-empathizing general whom Webb, as secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan, appointed commandant of the corps.

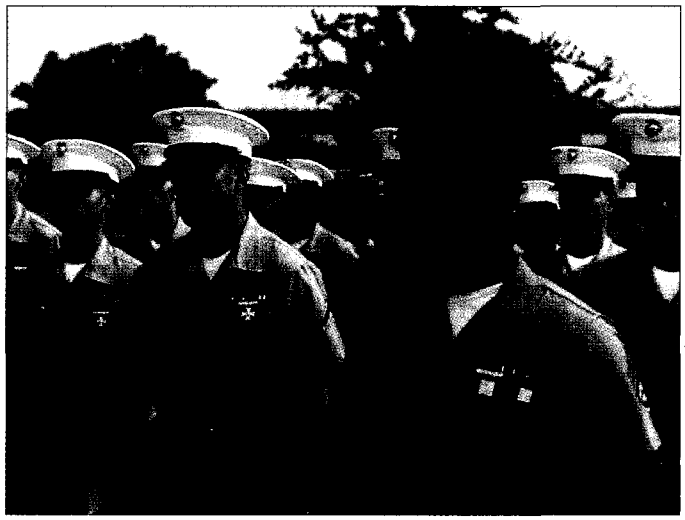

PHOTO COURTESY OF SGT. DAN BIGELOW, U.S. MARINE CORPS

The few, the proud ...

The corps had been purged of its deadwood, and recruit quality and training improved, before their tenure. With that foundation, Gray concentrated on improving fighting capability by insisting that every Marine undergo infantry training and restoring combat training to boot camp.

So demanding is Parris Island now that 14 percent of recruits will not last through boot camp (compared to 7 percent in the Army). For those who make it, and are transformed in the process, graduation, when they are pronounced Marines for the first time, is poignant, the pronouncement of the words, "Good morning, Marines," a moment gleaming with hope. They are now part of a brotherhood.

Parris Island makes the Marines what they are, but it also is an anachronism, so alien to society that Disney has actually started offering tours of the island. And so the real clash between worlds comes when values and behaviors drilled in a perfectly controlled environment are suddenly tested by reality.

From Earnest Winston Jr., the former gang member, comes the suggestion that some cultures may be even stronger than the Marines: "This recruit loved what he was doing being a criminal," he says just before graduation. "This recruit was perfect at it—armed robbery, drug distribution, distribution of firearms, drive-by shootings."

At the time Ricks goes to press, Winston is still skeptical about the Marines—but still in the corps. He concedes that it likely saved his life. (What does it say that an inner-city resident feels safer in the military than on the streets?)

But one-third of all new Marines fail to make it through their first term of enlistment, including some of those Ricks follows. They are felled by the strains of young marriages, financial stress, or simply temptation. "The single greatest predictor of satisfaction in the Corps for the members of 3086 is simple distance from home," Ricks writes. "Generally, the farther away from their hometowns these new Marines are posted, the more they like the Corps."

Some, however, become disillusioned with the corps itself. At Camp Lejeune, for example, the new Marines encounter superiors who are dishonest, lazy, overweight, and prone to excess of drugs, drink, or women. But most Marines adhere to the codes of conduct, and the mindset, with which they leave Parris Island: honor, integrity, duty, discipline. Since those aren't exactly the ruling values in the civilian world these days, the Marines are, put simply, disgusted by everyone from their friends to their president.

That can only mean they will become more resistant to orders from civilian overseers they see as amoral, and more inclined to impose their values on society—

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to define it, rather than simply defending it. Those subscribing to that notion may be a subculture in the corps now, but it is one with a growing constituency.

Ricks points to two factors that have worsened the civil-military gap: the lack of elites serving in the military, and the maintenance of a large military in peacetime. Ricks ably chronicles the decline in service among those in leadership positions. The end of the draft both narrowed the pool of people serving and professionalized the military; fewer people circulate through on the short tours of duty that once instilled both appreciation for and understanding of the military. The smaller number of people serving, and their longer terms of service, has led to an "us-and-them" mentality. And as liberals have shunned the military since Vietnam and the draft's end, often driving ROTC branches off college campuses, the officer corps has become more conservative—actively so, Ricks says.

Meanwhile, political leaders, especially in Congress, are increasingly indifferent to military issues, even as their actions have major repercussions for that military. (Ricks notes that base closings have left most of the military concentrated in the South and West, geographically alienating it from the more liberal Northeast.) And they are ignorant, which makes it even more difficult for the military to respect their policy decisions, even as those decisions often involve placing blind faith in the military. Add to that the lack of a clear enemy with the Cold War's end and the military's superiority complex because it has solved problems, such as drugs, that civilian society has not, and you are left with a potentially toxic combination. "It is very easy when defining the threat as 'chaos,'" Ricks notes, "to blur the line between foreign and domestic enemies."

Ricks offers several suggestions for bridging the gap, starting with reinstating the draft, or combining it with a national service option. Given that that seems unlikely in the immediate future, he says, other options should be considered: expand ROTC programs, for example, and encourage military officers to pursue both civilian education and civilian careers, including perhaps political office.

But the biggest change, Ricks argues, needs to come not from the military but from the rest of us. Ignorance of the military, he says, is just one manifestation of a larger problem: "the separation of professional Americans, or the upper middle class, from the broad concerns of society." As long as that self-imposed isolation continues, and as long as parents of all classes (and schools for all classes) fail to demand the discipline, excellence, teamwork, and honor instilled at Parris Island, the estrangement will only deepen.

FOLLOW IN FAMOUS FOOTSTEPS ...

The *Monthly* is seeking applicants for winter/spring interns. Internships involve all aspects of magazine production, business, writing, editing, and design, and are unpaid. Past interns have gone on to careers at *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, the State Department, and the White House. Applicants should send a cover letter, resumé, and writing samples to: Kathleen Nuccetelli, *The Washington Monthly*, 1611 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, or fax us at 202/332-8413.

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Political Booknotes

Listening to Lyndon

by Harry McPherson

LYNDON JOHNSON'S PRESIDENCY is among the more controversial in American history—in part because of the man himself, in part because of the chaotic period in which he served. But about one aspect of his time in office there is, or ought to be, unanimity: Between November 22, 1963, and his nomination in August, 1964, Johnson performed a tremendous service for the nation, providing firm and resourceful leadership at a time when millions of Americans despaired of their civic order.

TAKING CHARGE: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964
Edited by Michael R. Beschloss
Simon & Schuster, $30

Taking Charge covers this period, and the effect of reading it is to recall Johnson with a vividness not captured by any other book with which I am familiar. It is to appreciate once again that this firm, resourceful leader was also a wheeling, dealing operator, and a provincial to boot—not of Texas alone, but of the province of politics. Almost every conversation picked up by Johnson's White House recording devices (without the knowledge of the other party, for the most part) had as its purpose, on LBJ's side, the attainment of some political end—not stamp collecting, golf, tennis, poker, religion, sailing, or any of the other hobbies and interests with which presidents have entertained themselves, but politics. His was an utterly focused, almost hermetic world in which most things had value in proportion to their contribution to his political goals—which, during this period, ranged from passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the "War on Poverty" program, to the avoidance of spattering by petty scandals, to the containment of his most feared and despised opponent, Bobby Kennedy.

What comes through these dialogues, superbly edited by Michael Beschloss, is Johnson's relentless, unashamed pressure on the various parties who appear on the tapes— pressure intended to make the person involved feel that if he (there were few she's in that era) failed to help, he would be letting down the nation, or some worthy part of it, or—at least as important—the beleaguered Lyndon Johnson himself.

Even when the purpose of the talk was to make peace, the pressure could surface. Nine days into Johnson's presidency I attended church with him on Capitol Hill. On the way back to the White House, Johnson, who had seemed painfully shaken a week before, was ebullient. He had just persuaded Earl Warren to chair the commission investigating Kennedy's assassination—by reminding him that he had put on a doughboy's khaki in 1918 to serve his country, and could do no less in this hour of national need. He was pleased by Warren's agreement, because it would give credibility to the investigation; he was exhilarated by having obtained it through an irresistible appeal to Warren's patriotism.

When we reached the White House, he began a series of meetings with persons with whom he had become estranged, and whose help he needed. One was FDR's first special assistant, the Washington lawyer James Rowe. The Rowes and the Johnsons had been intimate friends for many years, until Johnson's constant complaints about scheduling during the 1960 campaign had caused Rowe, his volunteer scheduler, to resign in a fury. I believe they had not spoken since. Johnson asked Rowe's forgiveness, saying, simply, that he had behaved atrociously. The scene, in an Oval Office flooded with brilliant autumn sunlight, was affecting, bringing tears to Jim Rowe's eyes. He insisted that he had been most at fault, failing to appreciate the stress upon Johnson. The president squinted at him. "God damn it, Jim, can't you be content to be the first man the thirty-sixth president of the United States has apologized to?" Before Rowe could answer, Johnson was asking him how he ought to deal with Joe Rauh, the liberal activist with whom Johnson had been at odds for years, and whom he now needed to reassure about civil rights.

The immediacy of that scene, the relentless attention to what Texans call "bidness" (in this case, making peace in order to pass legislation later), and the sheer fun to be had from hearing Johnson operate, are recapitulated in page after page of *Taking Charge*. Harry Middleton, the director of the Johnson Library, should be celebrated for releasing these tapes. Michael Beschloss' wise annotations bring Johnson into focus as if he were in the next room—on the phone, forever insisting, griping, mocking, leading a shaken country toward good and ill.

HARRY MCPHERSON, *a Washington lawyer, was counsel to Lyndon Johnson from 1965 to 1969.*

Cyber-Mamma's Message

by Daniel H. Pink

OF THE FEW HUNDRED SPEECHES I wrote while working for Vice President Al Gore, the last one may have been the most significant. I didn't know it at the time. But Esther Dyson did.

Back in July, the president and vice president convened several dozen high-tech luminaries in the White House East Room to announce the administration's policy governing commerce on the Internet. "A Framework for Global Electronic Commerce" declared that government's proper course of action was *in*action: that the way to protect the public interest was to let private interests battle it out. In the vice president's

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remarks that afternoon, I gave him the following line, which he delivered with typical flair. "Our approach to electronic commerce," he said, "must be guided by a digital Hippocratic Oath: 'First, do no harm.'" The assembled crowd of computer geeks and digerati applauded lustily, and the vice president soaked up the approval of his fellow cybertravelers. Then he ad-libbed, "I'm not surprised that Esther Dyson is leading the applause."

Dyson had a seat in that audience thanks to her reputation as one of cyberspace's sharpest thinkers (and one of the few women to achieve influence in that male-dominated world). Her newsletter on the computer and Internet industries, *Release 1.0*, is must reading for the digital elite. Her annual conference, the P.C. Forum, is a greenhouse of new products, hot deals, and fresh gossip. That afternoon, Dyson understood instantly what I realized only later: The public philosophy she embodies, evangelizes, and helped create had triumphed in spectacular fashion.

A Democratic president and vice president—and a commission headed by Ira Magaziner, late of the Clinton health care plan—had studied the Internet and declared "hands off." They concluded that this massive network of networks—the most powerful social and economic phenomenon to emerge in several decades—was best regulated not by well-intentioned government officials, but by profit-seeking engineers and entrepreneurs. Never before had government evaluated something so fundamental to America's economic and social foundation—think railroads, highways, or television—and announced its intention to do pretty much nothing.

RELEASE 2.0: A Design for Living in the Digital Age
By Esther Dyson
Broadway Books, $25

Score one for the libertarians.

In *Release 2.0: A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, Dyson's attempt to decode the Net, she advances the idea that private markets and self-organizing individuals can fashion the Internet's rules and boundaries far better than any centralized, or even democratic, authority. This notion—Dyson would call it a "meme," an idea that evolves like a species and infects like a virus—pervades every chapter and leads to some provocative conclusions.

Take intellectual property. Seriously, take it. That's what Dyson advises. "Computers and the Internet that connects them make it easy and almost cost-free to reproduce content and send or retrieve it anywhere in the world. The Net makes light work of what used to be tedious and slow," she explains. Consequently, Dyson questions whether government should bother vigorously enforcing copyright laws that prohibit unauthorized duplication. Since bits move at the speed of light and law enforcement does not, such a tactic would likely fail. But more important, she says, companies don't need strict

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enforcement because intellectual property now abides by a new set of economic rules. As Dyson smartly puts it, "The source of commercial value will be people's attention, not the content that consumes their attention." Thus, it will be harder to make money merely selling copies. The real action will come from unique, customized products and services bundled with or connected to the copies' content. Dyson figures savvy companies will actually give away lots of content for free—not for moral or democratic reasons, but as a new business model.

Here's an example of what she means. Suppose a few people decide to e-mail scads of copies of *Washington Monthly* articles all over the planet or to post 30 years of issues on their website—in both cases, likely violations of copyright law. The smart move is not to shut down these folks. Instead, watch them with a wary eye, but let them proceed. Their work could make money for this magazine by encouraging people to buy subscriptions, attend conferences sponsored by the *Monthly*, or pay to hear its editors speak before their group.

The general rule applies to other areas, too. Instead of fighting technology with old laws, we should embrace it with the marketplace's new logic. For foul behavior by individuals online, Dyson says that commercial Internet service providers ought to be the first line of defense. Don't call the cops or write your congressman; tell America Online to kick the person out of your virtual community or you'll sign up with Prodigy. For relations among nations and businesses, Dyson suggests "pushing as much of world governance as possible into the realm of commerce, since commercial law arouses much less emotion than other kinds. The more you can make things a matter of contracts and market bargaining, the less government—and the less agreement among governments—you need in the first place."

What's as noteworthy as Dyson's arguments is how widely they are now accepted. Present the libertarian position on governing the Internet to just about anyone on the traditional right, left, or in between, and he or she'd probably agree. I do. On this, President Clinton and Newt Gingrich hold almost identical views. And that presidential report issued in July—most of which spells out things government should refrain from doing—affirms this remarkable libertarian consensus.

One innovative aspect of Dyson's book is that she considers it, like computer software, a work in progress, subject to innumerable upgrades. The paperback edition of her book will be called *Release 2.1*, because it will incorporate "comments, criticisms, examples, arguments, whatever" that readers have e-mailed to her (edyson@edventure.com) or posted on her Web site (www.release2-0.com). That's a good thing, because this papyrus-based software could use some de-bugging.

As a book—the mother of all meme vessels—*Release 2.0* is somewhat disappointing. It's often difficult to follow, in part because readers confront a new subheading on just about every page. In fact, in many ways *Release 2.0* is written more in the rhythm of a newsletter than a book—subheading, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph ... subheading, paragraph, paragraph, paragraph. The result is that the whole of its 289 pages is less than the sum of its 200 parts.

And much of what's on these pages is pedestrian. Here's Dyson on geopolitics: "As long as the world contains people, it will have conflicts." On cultural anthropology: "Many social norms differ from community to community." On management: "As change becomes constant, leaders must have the flexibility and vision to handle it." On human nature: "Child or adult, we are all special compared with machinery."

She also has a tendency to try to accomplish with punctuation what she cannot with words. To portray exuberance or irony or just about any other emotion, she deploys exclamation points. Lots of exclamation points. For example, in her design rules for digital life—her advice for how individuals can navigate the dig-

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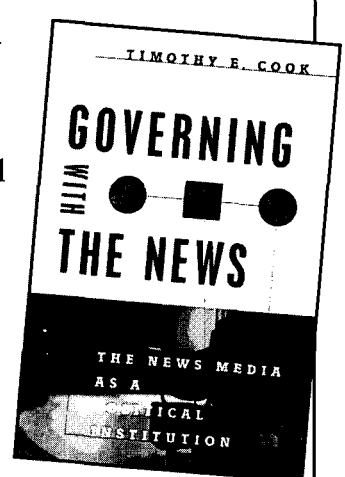

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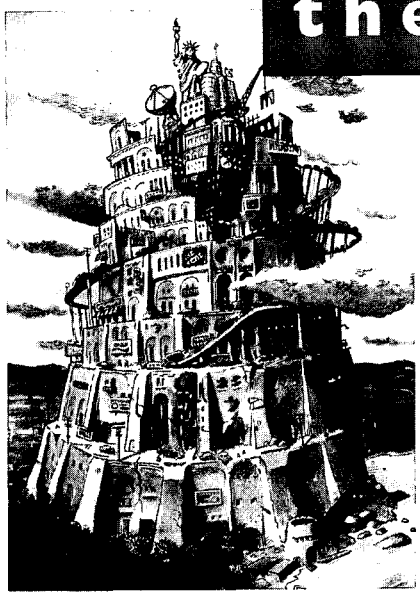
Thomas H. Naylor and William H. Willimon

sizing the U S A



"[Naylor and Willimon] continue their search for purpose and significance. Practically everywhere they turn they see Americans paying a high price for the bigness and complexity of modern society, and they warn that imposed unity and universality are false solutions. . . . [They] appropriate the term *downsizing* for their own use; it becomes a tool for clearing away the physical and spiritual clutter in our lives to help us discover that less really can be more."

— ***BOOKLIST***

"Legions of Americans will agree with this book's central thesis: big is bad. . . . Here the bigness problem is applied to our major social institutions — the economy, the city, the educational system, religion, and the state. . . . The book is like going back to college."

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ital world—the exclamation points outnumber the pages. So some editorial advice for *Release 2.1*: Get rid of the exclamation points! They do nothing to sharpen your arguments!! (And while you're at it, kill half your parenthetical asides. They mostly contain afterthoughts.)

I'd also have preferred to read much more about Dyson's own life and less about her sometimes unremarkable thoughts on cyberspace. Dyson is an intriguing woman, and the sections of the book—usually just a few sentences—in which she discusses her own life can be captivating. She is the daughter of renowned physicist Freeman Dyson, "raised in the academic hothouse around Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, with Nobel laureates as dinner guests." She wrote for the *Harvard Crimson* in the late 1960s and *Forbes* in the 1970s. As a Wall Street securities analyst a decade later, she was one of the first people to discover a fledgling company called Federal Express, where she became fast friends with FedEx chief information officer Jim Barksdale, now CEO of a not-so fledgling company called Netscape.

She quickly became the Wayne Gretzky of high-tech—someone with an uncanny talent for skating to where the puck will be. By 1983, she had taken over a newsletter that covered the computer industry—just as that industry was on the brink of exploding. Early this decade, she recast her newsletter to cover the Internet—again just as that industry was about to catch fire. Her latest venture is investing in computer companies in the young democracies of Russia and Eastern Europe. I wanted to know more about her experiences.

One personal detail Dyson does reveal, however, illuminates much about her philosophy. Forty-something years old, well-educated, adviser to corporate titans and government leaders, Dyson has never voted. "Voting does not make a real democracy, any more than taxes are an expression of philanthropy," she writes. She says she very recently registered, but has yet to cast a ballot.

Maybe by deciding to vote, she's once again onto the next big thing. For now, though, her book is further proof that computers and the Internet have secured—and perhaps validated—libertarianism's ascendance in America's public philosophy at the end of the century. And Dyson, to her credit, is Hippocratic in her views without being hypocritical in her actions. Unlike many liberals—those, for instance, who celebrate public schools but send their kids to private ones—she lives by the credos she asserts. Since free copies are a sound business model, and governments can't and shouldn't waste their time enforcing outdated intellectual property laws, Dyson is posting large sections of *Release 2.0* on her website for anyone, anywhere to read—gratis.

In a world of $695 newsletters and $25 hardcovers, we should applaud Esther Dyson for giving away some memes for free.

DANIEL H. PINK, *chief speechwriter to Vice President Al Gore from 1995 to 1997, is a freelance journalist and speechwriter in Washington, D.C.*

The Road Not Taken

by Joseph D. McNamara

READER BEWARE: *Sensible Justice: Alternatives to Prison* is not what it appears at first glance. The subtitle of the book suggests, and the bookjacket promises, that the author will explore "creative solutions some states and cities nationwide have devised to tackle America's expensive and controversial prison problem." Instead, David Anderson, a journalist and former member of the *New York Times* board, provides a more or less conventional journalistic road map of how we made prisons a growth industry.

SENSIBLE JUSTICE: Alternatives to Prison
By David Anderson
The New Press, $25

Granted, there is much to examine concerning the vast increase in the number of Americans incarcerated over the past two decades. It is remarkable that we now have roughly 1.5 million people behind bars and 4.5 million under some form of penal control—most of whom have been sentenced for nonviolent crimes. But even in exploring this phenomenon, Anderson oversimplifies, claiming that Republicans, the prison-building industry, and the National Rifle Association were the prime movers in the enactment of more punitive policies. The NRA did call for increased penalties for the use of firearms during a crime as a way of obstructing gun-control legislation, but those sentenced under so-called firearm enhancements make up a minor percentage of those incarcerated. The prison-building lobby came along after the political rhetoric denouncing crime. And although many Republicans like to rage about law and order, the harshest mandatory sentences in history were passed by a Democratically controlled Congress. Likewise, severe sentences—including the death penalty for some 50-odd federal crimes—increasingly have been championed by President Clinton, who has boasted that he must be doing something right because there were more than a million Americans in prison. Anderson also fails to mention that it was Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson who first raised crime as a national issue in presidential campaigns (until then, it was viewed as a local matter), leading to increased publicity and alarm, and producing the present "crisis" atmosphere legislation on federal and local levels.

Moreover, although Anderson does allow that journalists helped create the public fear by sensationalizing crime, he barely scratches the surface of the media's culpability. A media study showed that from 1993 through 1996, while the nation's homicide rate was decreasing by 20 percent, television news coverage of murders rose 721 percent. The present corrupt, racist, violent, and ineffective prison system could not exist without media complicity. A journalist like Anderson could have shed light on a phenomenon that conditioned the American public to approve present policies.

Anderson does deserve credit for pointing out the basic inhumanity of those policies, and through anecdotes

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he tries to combat the dehumanizing of criminals that allows the present treatment. He weakens his own arguments, however, by supporting unproven claims that tough police methods and the increased number of people confined have been partially responsible for decreasing crime rates over the past five years.

Getting down to the actual task of exploring alternatives to the current penal system, Anderson makes a courageous plea for temperance in a time of public anger over crime, perceived failure of the courts and correctional programs, and increasing political demagoguery. But his arguments are less than compelling—and unlikely to influence politicians in the current "tough on crime" atmosphere. He praises mentoring by parole agents and others; sentencing to community work, residential confinement, boot camps, drug treatment; and a variety of approaches in opposition to prison. However, he acknowledges that for the most part, evaluation of these programs does not show lower rates of recidivism for participants. Furthermore, some of the programs that claim success are too new to judge and in many cases are evaluated by those running the programs, with the inevitable inflated claims of success. Finally, while he points out that recidivism rates for offenders who have been incarcerated are no better—and the fiscal costs of incarceration considerably higher— than the alternatives to prison, this argument is unlikely to sway public opinion. Polls show that Americans are still fearful of crime and angry at criminals. As such, the public is unlikely to be persuaded that tax dollars spent for prisons are wasted. Most disappointingly, Anderson fails to examine what is perhaps the most promising alternative to the current system of mass incarceration: decriminalizing drug use. By the turn of the millenium it is likely that the majority of inmates will be serving time for non-violent drug offenses. Consequently, it's hard to understand why the decriminalization option doesn't at least bear exploration.

JOSEPH D. MCNAMARA, *retired police chief of San Jose, Calif., and author of five books, is currently a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

Philadelphia Story

by Michael Brus

ED RENDELL IS A LIKABLE MAN. His impulsiveness, eternal optimism, and political dexterity have won him more popularity and better press than perhaps any other Philadelphia mayor. Along with his sidekick, chief of staff, and über-administrator David Cohen, Rendell has stared down the unions, saved Philadelphia from bankruptcy, and enticed countless developers to build their malls and hotels in Center City rather than in the suburbs. His manic enthusiasm is legendary, as is his temper—he has assaulted a reporter on two separate occasions, and propositioned another while on the record. All of this is forgiven by Philadelphians, who see "Fast Eddie" as their irrepressible advocate. Rendell's aides, Buzz Bissinger writes in *A Prayer for the City*, see him not as a politician so much as "a big kid having the time of his life."

But whatever good may come of Rendell's efforts, they may all be for naught, Bissinger laments. Despite his unstinting admiration for the mayor and his political miracles, Bissinger duly notes that middle-class jobs and middle-class taxpayers continue to leave the city. Since 1990, he writes, Philadelphia has lost more residents than any other city in the country. Meanwhile, the city grows poorer, with almost a third of its residents now living below the poverty line.

Still, Rendell makes a thrilling—and sometimes edifying—subject for a book. Written with exclusive access to both the mayor and Cohen, *A Prayer for the City* is partly the "inside story" of the Rendell administration's first term and partly an elegy to a dying industrial city. The "five heroes" of the subtitle are Cohen and four other Philadelphia residents—a black victim of the ghetto, a white victim of naval-yard layoffs, and two middle-class city employees who reluctantly quit their jobs and move to the suburbs.

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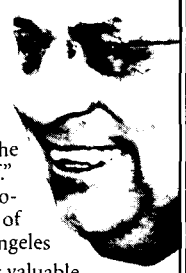

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on its access to Rendell and Cohen. The impulsive pol and precise, punctual chief of staff are the yin and yang of the mayor's office, one handling the rhetoric, the other the details. They are the protagonists in a never-ending political crisis—first the budget, then racial crimes, then the closing of the naval yard, and so on. Unfortunately, this narrative is interrupted by portraits of the other "heroes." Not only have we heard their tales before, these four people seem chosen solely to embody demographic trends—white flight, blue-collar job insecurity, and black family breakdown. Interspersed with these portraits is Bissinger's lament for the gritty, industrial Philadelphia of yore. These ruminations are single-minded and tiresome—at one point, Bissinger wastes half a page listing nearly every ship built at the naval yard. Punctuated as it is with cliches and pretentiousness, *Prayer* is as an odd mixture of engaging political history and dreary nostalgia.

A PRAYER FOR THE CITY: The True Story of a Mayor and Five Heroes in a Race Against Time
By Buzz Bissinger
Random House, $25.95

The political history starts early. At college, Rendell was a fraternity goof-off and academic underachiever. Once, on a double date, he offered his friend three Peter Paul Mounds bars to switch dates. The fellow agreed, and Rendell's newly-bought girl ended up as his wife. After law school he became an effective and popular district attorney, but two poorly run campaigns sunk his primary bids for governor and, the first time, for mayor. Considered a political has-been by 1991, an invigorated Rendell beat the odds and won the mayoralty. The key to the victory—and, as it turned out, to almost everything else—was Cohen, a Harvard Law phenom dubbed "the billing king" by his law colleagues. (He returned to private practice a year ago.) Cohen was Rendell's political strategizer, media spinner, and intimate. Always disciplined and tactful, he kept the mayor on message and on time.

Rendell had no honeymoon. After inauguration, Cohen calculated that the city's five-year budget gap was larger than the entire budget of Boston, Houston, or Baltimore. Rendell knew another tax raise would hurt the city as much as bankruptcy would, so he had no choice but to strike a hard bargain with the unions—a Philadelphia bulwark. Union fat was waiting to be cut. At Philadelphia Airport, for instance, it literally used to take three people to change a light bulb—a mechanic to remove the cover, an electrician to replace the bulb, and a custodian to sweep up the debris. With iron-clad job security and salary hikes out-pacing inflation, municipal employees were among the most coddled in the nation. Rendell staked his career on the showdown. After months of injunctions, court delays, union vandalism, and a short strike, the union blinked. Just months into his first term, Rendell balanced the budget.

But the mayor's identity has largely become that of corporate cheerleader. One of his worst publicity snafus was skipping a neighborhood meeting on violent crime in order to read a proclamation for "Hot Dog Day" at City Hall—accompanied by a six-foot pig. Attending the meeting would not have solved much of substance, admits Bissinger, and Hatfield Quality Meats did contribute $5,000 to the city recreation department in exchange for "Hot Dog Day." A pragmatist more than a sentimentalist, Rendell sees corporate cheerleading as the next best thing to giving up. His valiant, albeit unsuccessful attempt to save the naval yard is emblematic of this approach—with a desperate Cohen even making an unannounced, 11th-hour flight to Bremen to court a German investor. "I can suck up as good as anyone on Earth," he reminds Cohen over the phone. "That may be the best thing we've learned in my years on the job."

Rendell's story says much about the possibilities and limitations of city government. When Bissinger's narrative leaves the confines of City Hall, however, his reach exceeds his grasp. His lengthy profiles of "ordinary" Philadelphia heroes seem obligatory, and his prose is often flat and cliche-ridden—reminiscent of mediocre newspaper writing, not of a sweeping urban history, as the book aspires to be. Bissinger is awash in nostalgia for Old Philly. Not unreasonably, he sees Rendell as its last, best hope.

MICHAEL BRUS *is a student at the University of Pennsylvania.*

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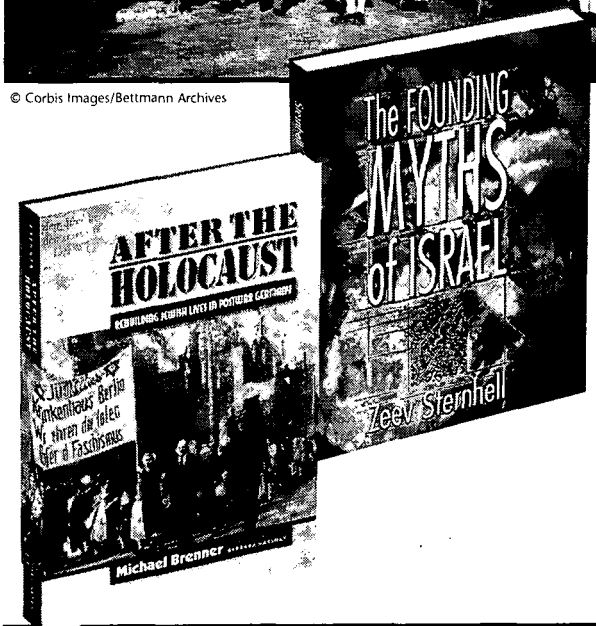

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